



by Doug Moench, Dan Dug and Ron Harris



AZTEC ACIE



The PENUMBRA

ECLIPSE COMICS • P. O. BOX 199 • GUERNEVILLE, CALIFORNIA 95446

ON THE RACKS



DNAGENTS no. 20
Tank gets involved in a plot to kill a foreign leader when he takes an uncharacteristic trip to the Skylark Mansion (last seen in no. 5).

PRESSBUTTON no. 4
The dramatic confrontation between Mysta Mystralls and Donthax, the man who brought her to life and is now sworn to bring her to death!

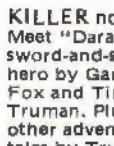


ZOT! no. 8
At long last — Zot and Jenny go all the way "Through the Door." What do they find? And what will the priests do to them later?

NIGHT MUSIC no. 3
The final issue of this art lover's delight. P. Craig Russell adapts Kipling's Jungle Book story, "The King's Ankus." One full-length tale.



CROSSFIRE no. 9
An industrial spy by the name of Gemstone is moving in on Crossfire's turf. In this sequel to the "Machete Killer" story.



KILLER no. 1
Meet "Darai," a new sword-and-sorcery hero by Gardner Fox and Timothy Truman. Plus two other adventure tales by Truman.



CAP'N QUICK no. 2
Finally, the return of Cap'n Quick and the Foozle. What have they been up to, and what will they get embroiled in this time?

NOW BATTING FOR . . . cat's got the flu as the deadline for this month's Penumbra is upon us, so it looks like it's up to me, your ever ecliptic publisher to step into the batter's box with my 34 inch Louisville Slugger.

IN MY SPARE TIME: As I travel around the country to comics shops and conventions, I'm often asked what kind of comics I read (aside from all of the wonderful Eclipse titles listed to the left!). Since I read so many kinds of comics, it's not easy giving a short, concise answer. But since I have this entire column to fill, this seems like as good a place as any to give you the Top Hits in my book.

I recently sat down and read the third boxed set in the **CARL BARKS LIBRARY** published by Another Rainbow (Box 2206, Scottsdale, AZ 85252). The sets are expensive, running around \$100 each, but if you've never read any of Barks' Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge stories, you're missing one of the greatest treats ever served up on the comics page. Another Rainbow has a payment plan to help you along if \$100 is too rich for one single purchase.

WILL EISNER'S QUARTERLY (Kitchen Sink Press, No. 2 Swamp Road, Princeton, WI 54968) is on my must-read list the day it arrives in the mail. Will's new serialized graphic novel, "A Life Force," is one of the best things he's ever done, and considering some of the accomplishments he's had in the field of sequential art, that's saying a lot.

Blackthorne Publishing (786 Blackthorne Ave., El Cajon, CA 92020) just released two newspaper strip collections definitely worth your attention. Editor Shel Dorf has picked two excellent strips to begin his series. **DICK TRACY** is taken from 1946 and introduces Diet Smith and the 2-Way Wrist Radiol! **GASOLINE ALLEY** is more recent, featuring the 1981 sequence about **ROVER**.

We always keep a good supply of Simon and Kirby romance comics both in the office and at home. It's

funny how mature, and even relevant, many of those 35 year old stories still are.

I see that I'm starting to run out of room and I haven't even scratched the surface. I guess that's the way it always is — you never have enough room to list all your favorites, even current favorites. I'd be remiss, however, if, even on such an abbreviated list as this, I failed to mention the one strip that I find the most rewarding year, after year after year. If I may invoke the old scenario that I was going in a space ship and could only take one strip with me, what would that strip be . . . I'd have to beg for a complete 12 year run of Milton Caniff's **TERRY AND THE PIRATES**. What can I say about **TERRY** that hasn't been said before? If you haven't read it, go do so now. While I can't recommend the overpriced and poorly reproduced hardcover edition just released, you should be able to find some of the Nostalgia Press editions available in many comics stores. For drama, romance and adventure, it just can't be beat.

NEXT MONTH: cat will return and I can go back and read some more of those great comics . . .

Dean Mullaney

IN YOUR HANDS

Shakreen has escaped from her husband, Nin-Crocodile, taking their strange blank-eyed baby with her in a mirror box, in an attempt to set in motion her own counter-Ebonati gambit for trans-temporal power. Meanwhile, Jack the Ripper disguised as Lord of the Smoking Mirror, is carving up Aztecs and Ebonati alike. Is the Montezuma Conterminus still a safe port in the time-stream?

RECAPPED AFTER THE FACT

FIRST THERE WERE THE MYSTERIOUS BLUE LIGHTS SAID TO BE EMANATING FROM THE NETHERWORLD BENEATH THE ANCIENT TOLTEC RUINS AT TULA. THEN CAME THE GRISLY NEWS THAT TEZCATLIPOCA, THE MYTHICAL AZTEC DEMON, HAD COME TO LIFE BEARING HIS BLOODY BLADE.

HEADING SOUTH FOR TULA, BRIDGET AND I CAME UPON KROK'S WIFE, SHAKREEN, LEADING A CADRE OF ORIENTAL SHADOW KNIGHTS. IT WAS SHE, IF ONLY INDIRECTLY, WHO HAD SENT THE LITERALLY DISARMING MESSAGE BY WAY OF TEZCATLIPOCA. AFTER INSISTING THAT HER NEWBORN BABY "COULD BE MINE," SHAKREEN OFFERED ME A STRANGE BOX OF MIRRORS...

AND THAT'S WHEN KROK HIMSELF ATTACKED. SHAKREEN MANAGED TO GIVE THE MIRROR BOX TO ONE OF HER FLEETING SHADOW KNIGHTS--AND KROK'S NIGHT-GAUNTS IGNORED ME IN FAVOR OF PURSUING THE WOUNDED KNIGHT.

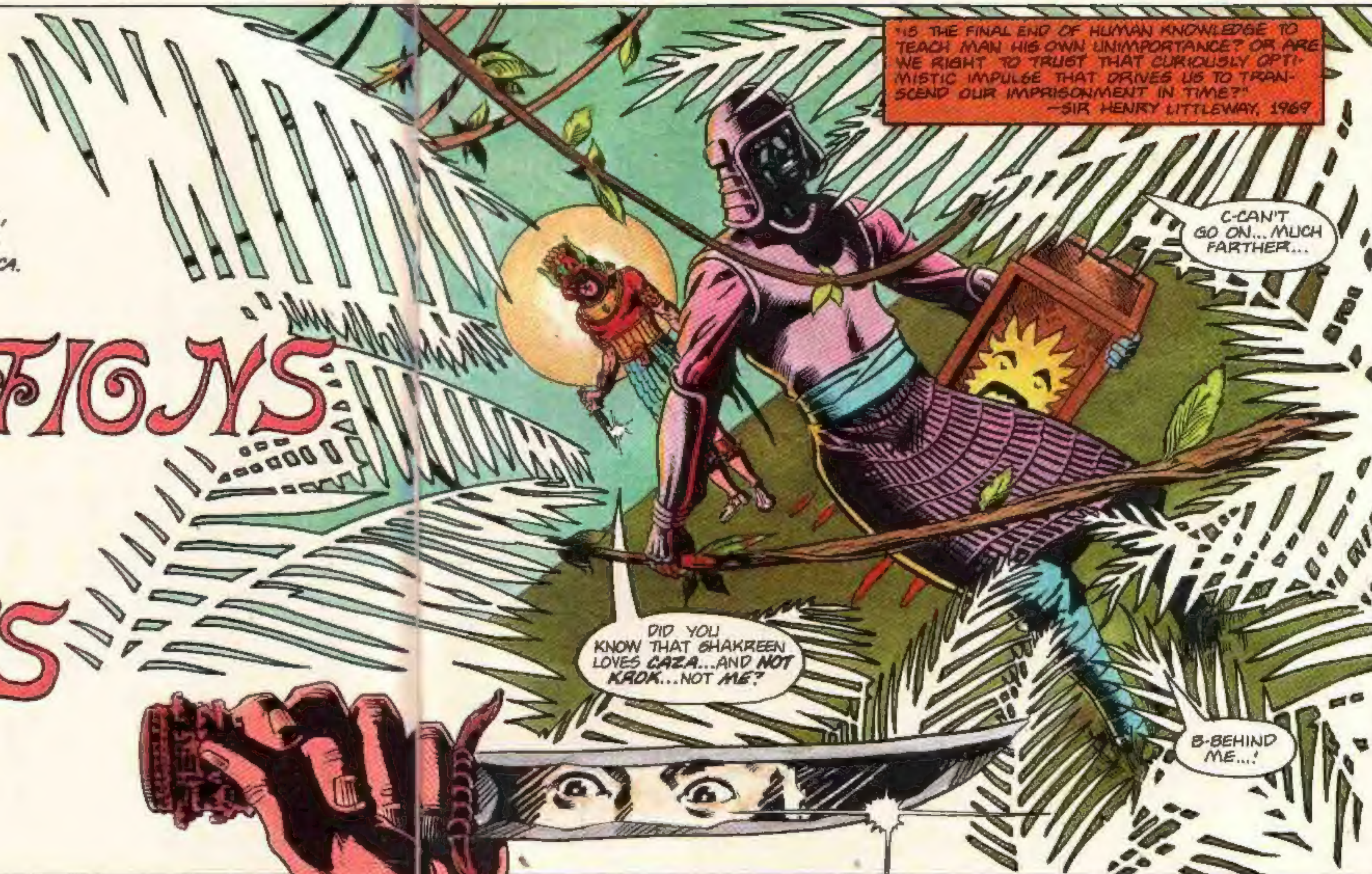
BRUISED EGO OR NOT, I KNEW THAT WHATEVER WAS IN THAT BOX HAD TO BE VERY IMPORTANT.

THERE WAS ONE THING, HOWEVER, I DID NOT KNOW AT THE TIME: SOMEONE ELSE WAS STALKING THE KNIGHT'S JAGGED SPATTER OF BLOOD—SOMEONE WHO KNEW SUCH TRAILS INTIMATELY, IF ONLY IN REVERSE.

HE WAS AN EBONATI WHO'D TAKEN MANY NAMES THROUGHOUT MY TIMESTREAM...

"SAUCY JACK" HAD BEEN ONE OF THEM, BUT RIGHT NOW, IN 1518 MEXICO, HE WAS CALLING HIMSELF THE LORD OF THE SMOKING MIRROR—TEZCATLIPOCA.

REFLECTIONS IN A DEMON'S EYE



"IS THE FINAL END OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE TO TEACH MAN HIS OWN UNIMPORTANCE? OR ARE WE RIGHT TO TRUST THAT CURIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC IMPULSE THAT DRIVES US TO TRANSCEND OUR IMPRISONMENT IN TIME?"
—SIR HENRY LITTLEWAY, 1969

C-CAN'T GO ON... MUCH FARTHER...

DID YOU KNOW THAT SHAKREEN LOVES CAZA...AND NOT KAZA...NOT ME?

B-BEHIND ME...



WHO--?
DID YOU KNOW THAT SHE IS LIKE ALL PENDULOUS PAP-DANGLING WOMEN--?



--TAKING OUR FLESH, ALWAYS TAKING IT, DEVOURING IT DEEP UP INTO THEIR BELLIES, BUT NEVER GIVING?

M-MUST GET B-BOX...

...BACK TO FORTRESS UNDER T-TOLTEC RUINS...



YES, I KNOW, SHADOW KNIGHT...BUT SINCE SHAKREEN IS MY PRETTY LADY, AND I HER MOST FAITHFUL SERVANT...

...AS A MEANS TO BARGAINING FOR HER LOVE...

...I WILL DELIVER IT THERE, AND KEEP IT THERE...



...OR HER BLOOD.



WHAT? YOUR BLOOD RUNS OUT BEFORE MY BLADE EVEN FALLS?

UHHNNN...



BUT YOUR BURDEN, AT LEAST, DOES NOT CHEAT ME.

PRETTY...SO PRETTY IS THAT FOUND WITHIN A BOX OF MIRRORS...



...AND FURTHER PROOF THAT ALL WOMEN ARE BEASTS.

KROK'S PLASMA COMET BURNS THE CAMPSITE TO GRITTY BLACK SAND...

YEAH... AND A FINE TIME TO TELL ME YOU AND HER ONCE HAD A *THING* GOING, ACE.

AT LEAST SHAKREEN GOT AWAY WITH HER THREE REMAINING SHADOW KNIGHTS.

I SUPPOSE WE GO TO **RESCUE** HER NOW?

NO, WE GO THE **OPPOSITE** WAY, BRIDGET--
BACK NORTH TOWARD **TENOCHTITLAN**.

BUT **WHY**? SHAKREEN WANTED TO GET THAT **MIRROR BOX** TO YOU, AND KROK WANTS TO **STOP** HER AND GET THE BOX FOR **HIMSELF**--WHILE YOU DON'T SEEM TO CARE ABOUT IT AT ALL. SO WHAT DO **WE** WANT FROM THIS MISSION?

NOTHING, BRIDGET...
NOTHING BUT OUR **LIVES**.

DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHAT'S **IN** THE BOX?

I THINK I DO.

WHAT?

THE BURDEN OF SIN.

ANOTHER OF YOUR EXASPERATING ANSWERS WHICH ALWAYS MEAN NO **REAL** ANSWER IS FORTHCOMING.

AND WHY **NOT**, DAMMIT?

BECAUSE... I **LOVE** YOU.

IT IS THE SAME SHADOW KNIGHT--BUT WHO TOOK THE BOX?

LET US HURRY TO **FIND OUT**--

--LEST KROK RESTORE US TO THE DEATH WHENCE WE WERE **SCULPTED**.

LOOK! THERE'S OUR "DEMON" TEZCATLIPOCA--WITH SOMETHING UNDER HIS ARM, MAYBE THE **BOX**...

...AND HE'S ANGLING **SOUTH**, PROBABLY TO THE **TOLTEC RUINS AT TULA**...

...WHICH MARKS OUR NEW DESTINATION--
IF I CAN TURN THE JEEP ON THIS
NARROW TRAIL...

BUT IF OUR ONLY GOAL IS TO
STAY ALIVE, WHY DON'T WE JUST
GO BACK TO THE A.C.E., JACK
INTO THE MELD, AND WAIT TILL
THIS BATTLE BETWEEN KROK
AND SHAKREEN IS OVER?

I OVERSIMPLIFIED, BRIDGET...

SINCE NEITHER KROK, NOR
SHAKREEN ARE HERE TO SCRAM-
BLE TIME, WE COULD SIMPLY
STAY OUT OF THEIR WAYS--

--BUT NOW A RANDOM
FACTOR HAS BEEN INTRODUCED
IN THE FORM OF SHAKREEN'S
AGENT, JACK THE RIPPER--

--WHO IS NOW OPERATING
IN THE GUISE OF TEZCATLIPOCA,
AND WHO WILL SCRAMBLE
HISTORY WITH EVERY BLOODY
STEP HE TAKES.

THEN, JUST AS I COMPLETE
THE TIGHT THREE-POINT TURN--

THE BOX! GIVE IT
TO US!

--WE ARE MISTAKEN
FOR THIEVES.

I'LL RAVE, YOU
SHOOT--AND DON'T LET
YOUR CONSCIENCE HOLD BACK
A SINGLE SLUG--THEY'RE
ALREADY DEAD!

IF YOU SAY SO, CHIEF
--BUT WHAT ABOUT
TEZCATLIPOCA?

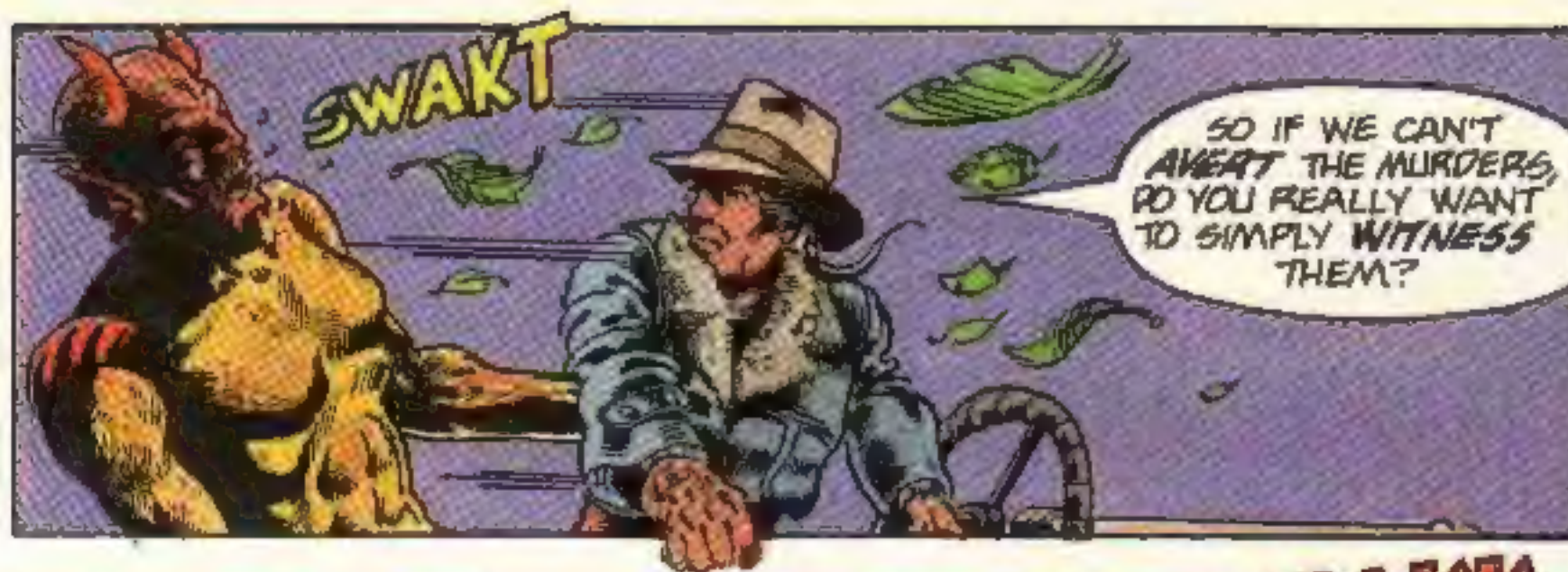
SINCE THE RIPPER WAS NEVER
CAUGHT, WE'LL NEVER KNOW, WILL WE?

IS HE JUST
AN EBONATI
DOPPELGANGER
OR WAS HE THE
REAL JACK THE
RIPPER?

COULDN'T
WE GO BACK TO
LONDON IN THE
1800S AND--

WHAT THE RIPPER
DID, BRIDGET, IS A
MATTER OF HISTORICAL
RECORD WHICH WE CAN-
NOT ALTER WITHOUT
CREATING DOXIE-
GLITCHES...

BRAM
BRAM
WUMP



SO IF WE CAN'T
AVERT THE MURDERS,
DO YOU REALLY WANT
TO SIMPLY WITNESS
THEM?



YUGH.

GOOD,
BECAUSE WE'VE
GOT TO STOP HIM
HERE AND NOW.



IT MAY NOT SATE
YOUR CURIOSITY, BUT
IT WILL PREVENT THE
HACKING OF ANY
MORE AZTECS—

—AS WELL AS
THE CREATION OF
NEW GLITCHES.



I JUST
REALIZED...

SINCE THE
BUTCHERY OF THOSE
WOMEN IN WHITECHAPEL
DIDN'T CREATE ANY
GLITCHES—



—THIS EBNATI
NUT COULDN'T BE
THE REAL JACK.

OUR DIALOGUE HAS
LONG SINCE VIOLATED
THE BOUNDRIES OF
BLISTER AND BLUFFED
NONCHALANCE...



...BUT IT DOES DIVERT
US FROM THE PLIGHT
OF THE MOMENT, SO
TO SPEAK—LIKE INANE,
EVER-CHANGING MAN.
TRAS—AND BESIDES,
WE'RE BOTH ENJOYING
THE HELL OUT OF OUR
POSE.

WHAT MAKES
YOU SO SURE
THE MURDERS
DIDN'T CREATE
GLITCHES?

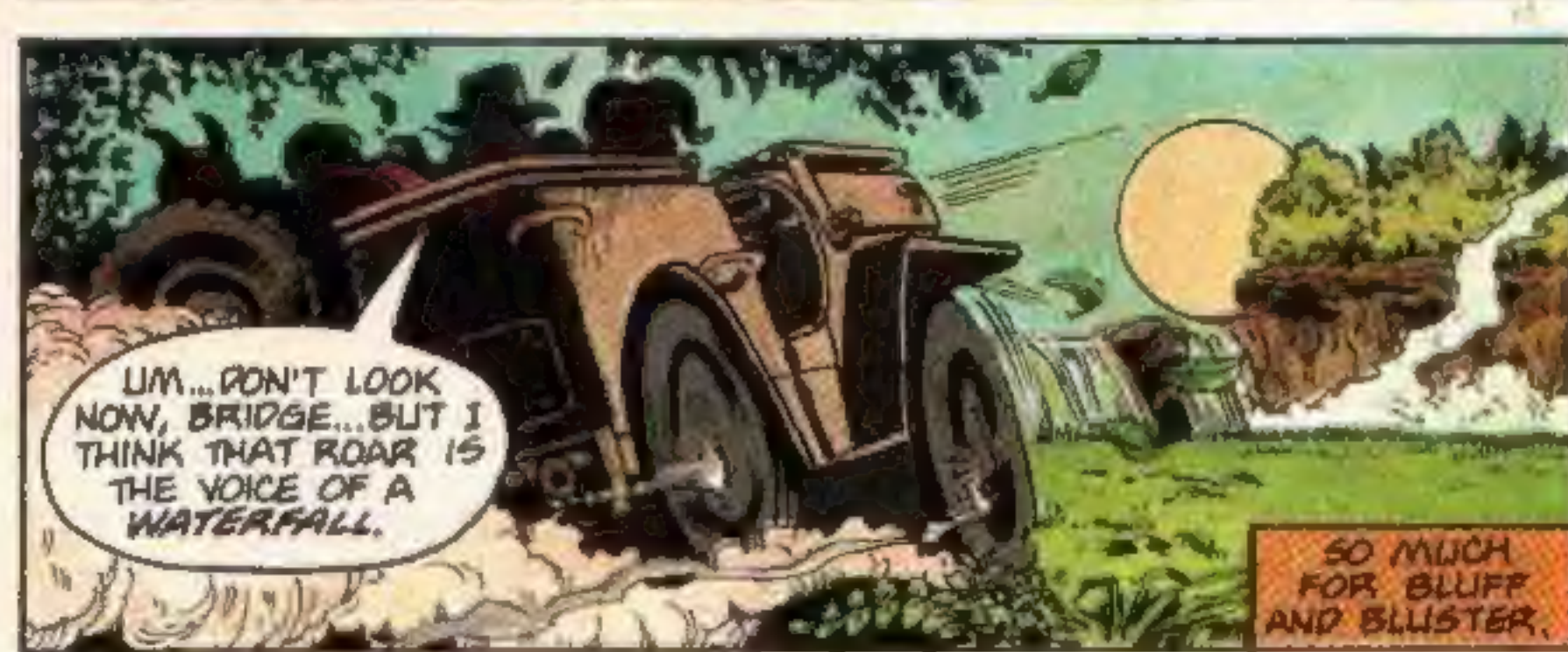
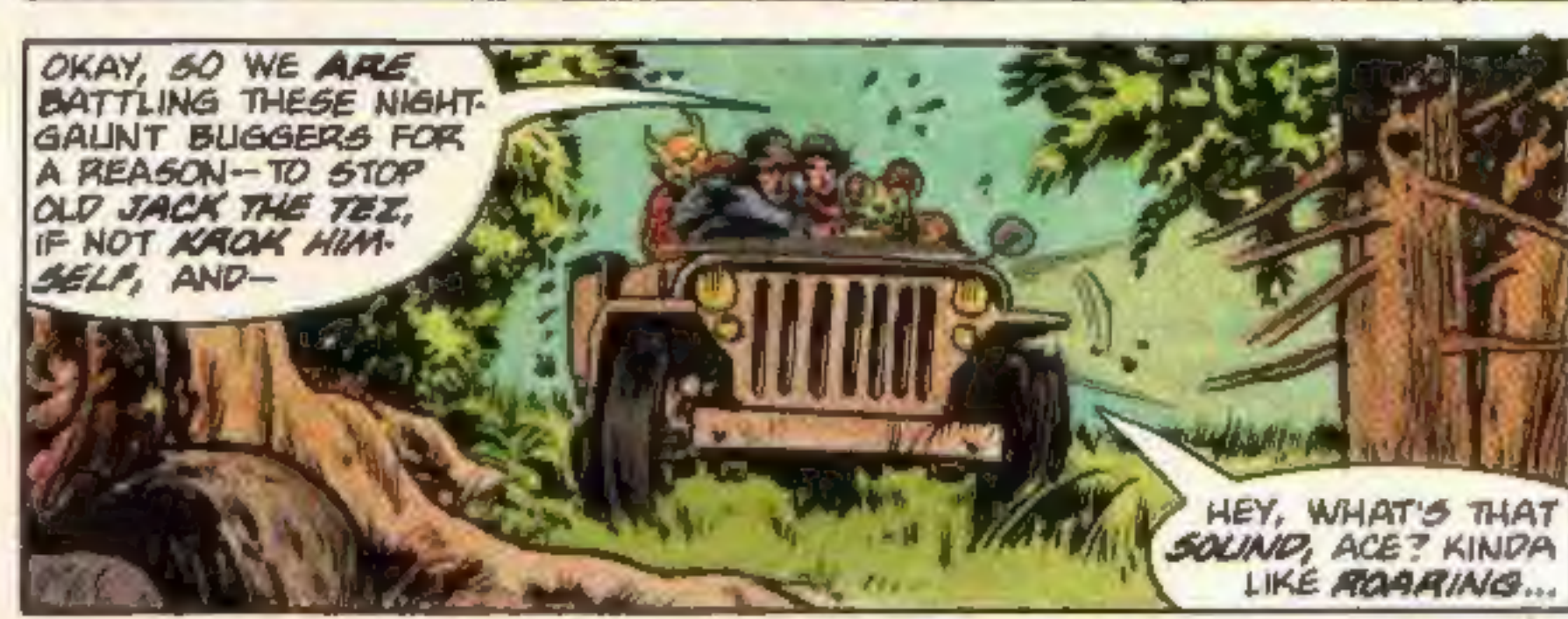
EVER HEAR OF
THE INDUSTRIAL
REVOLUTION?

AND THERE MAY
HAVE BEEN A DOZEN
MORE SUCH REPER-
CUSSIONS—LUCKILY,
JUST NOT ENOUGH
OF THEM TO SPLIT
THE SEAMS OF THE
TIME FABRIC.



BUT AS LONG
AS THE DARK BOYS
KEEP AT IT—

—THE GLITCHES'LL
KEEP PILING UP, UNTIL
SOONER OR LATER...



SO MUCH
FOR BLUFF
AND BLISTER.



MEANWHILE, ABOARD THE A.C.E.:

MORE INCONSIDERATE
COMPANIONS ONE COULD NOT
FIND IF ONE SEARCHED IN DER
MONKEYHOUSE—GOING OFF TO
LOLLYGAG ABOUT IN SOME
EXECRABLY HEDONISTIC
AZTEC BATH...

...LEAVING ME
HERE ALL ALONE MIT
DER DAMNED BOX
STOCKED MIT NOTHING
BUT DER DAMNED
BEATLES!



NOT IRRELEVANT TO ME, ONE OF THESE "TWO THINGS" MUST BE YOUR LOVE-DOVEY AFFAIR WITH HIS WIFE SHAKREEN... AND THE OTHER IS--?

SHESH, OKAY, YOU ONCE SAID YOU "TOOK HIS BREATH AWAY" AND THAT HE CAN'T BREATHE FOR LONG WITHOUT THE MASK, SO THAT'S ONE REASON, BUT--

ALSO, TWO THINGS--THE DUAL REASON FOR HIS MASK.

I HOPE YOU NEVER SEE THE OTHER, BRIDGET?

IF YOU'RE BOTH DOING THE SAME THING, WHAT MAKES YOU ANY DIFFERENT?

PERHAPS HIS RUTHLESSNESS... BUT EVEN THAT'S ONLY CAUSED BY HIS GREATER DESPERATION.

OHH-KAY, LET'S TRY A FRESH APPROACH. HE SEEMS TO HATE YOU--PERSONALLY.

HE DOES, FOR THE TWO THINGS, BUT THOSE ARE SEPARATE, IRRELEVANT MATTERS...

YES.

AND IT'S TRUE, BECAUSE WITH EACH PASSING MOMENT--

WHICH HINTS AT ANOTHER "LONG STORY" YOU'LL TELL ME SOMEDAY.

YES.

YOU'RE DRIVING ME CRAZY, Y'KNOW THAT? WHY COULDN'T YOU?

BECAUSE FROM HIS POINT OF VIEW, HE'S ONLY DOING THE SAME THING I'M DOING...

WE MUST RETRIEVE THE MIRROR BOX FROM OUR BROTHER KNIGHT...

AYE, SHAKREEN--

QUICKLY, MY SHADOW KNIGHTS--TILA IS STILL FAR.

BEFORE YOUR HUSBANDS' NIGHTMANTS DO

CRACK IS IN THE HERE AND NOW, AGE--WHY NOT TRY TO... ELIMINATE HIM?

MAYBE I WILL, SINCE FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW I SHOULD... BUT I'M "NOT SURE I COULD."

SHAKREEN--

AYE, SHAKREEN--

SHAKREEN--

AYE, SHAKREEN--

JUNGLED RUN

CRACK IS IN THE HERE AND NOW, AGE--WHY NOT TRY TO... ELIMINATE HIM?

MAYBE I WILL, SINCE FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW I SHOULD... BUT I'M "NOT SURE I COULD."

TUMBLE FUN

CRACK IS IN THE HERE AND NOW, AGE--WHY NOT TRY TO... ELIMINATE HIM?

MAYBE I WILL, SINCE FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW I SHOULD... BUT I'M "NOT SURE I COULD."

CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT, YOU KNOW.

AND NOW, SINCE THERE'S PROBABLY A BAD DAY AHEAD OF US... GOOD NIGHT.

MOOOO.

BETTER ROLL BACK THIS WAY, BLUSTER.

CATS ARE NOCTURNAL, Y'KNOW.

RUINED TULA

YOUR BROTHER KNIGHT NEVER MADE IT—BUT THE BOX HAS, IN THE HANDS OF MAD TEZCATLIPOCA.

CORNER HIM—AND BACK HIM TOWARD ME.

SO... SHE HAS NOT REACHED THE RUINS YET—JUST LIKE HER, TO KEEP THE GREAT TEZCATLIPOCA WAITING.

JUST LIKE ALL WOMEN—BEASTS WHO THINK THE CREASE BETWEEN THEIR LEGS IS THE PORTAL TO HEAVEN, RATHER THAN THE HELL I KNOW IT TO BE...

SHAKREEN WANTS THE BOX, JACK.

AHAH! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN YOU SHADOW KNIGHTS MIGHT BE LURKING IN THE DARK...

BUT DON'T WORRY—SHAKREEN WILL GET THE BOX...

...ONCE I HAVE GOTTEN HER BLOOD.

SOONER, I THINK—

—BY FAR.

I WILL BE IN OUR FORTRESS UNDER THE RUINS, MY KNIGHTS.

AS FOR JACK... HE'S MAD.

KILL HIM.

SO YOU WISH TO SEE BLOOD, SHADOWS?

THEN MAKE YOUR MOVES.



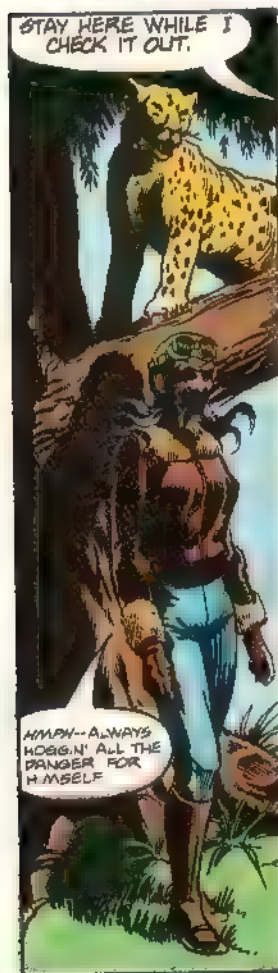
WE REACH TULA
THREE HOURS
PAST DAWN.

IT'S QUIET,
ACE.

AND LOOMING
STORMS ARE FOND
OF CONTRAST.

OH, BROTHERRR...

THERE—OUT IN
THE RUINS—LOOKS
LIKE IT MIGHT BE
A BODY...



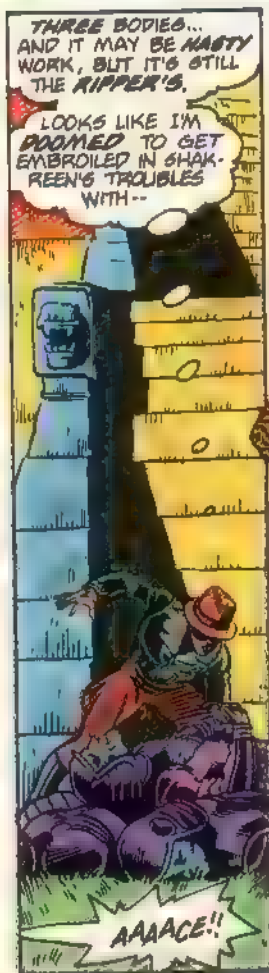
STAY HERE WHILE I
CHECK IT OUT.

MMH—ALWAYS
HOBG.N' ALL THE
DANGER FOR
H.MSELF



WHAT DOES HE THINK I
AM? A SISSY NAME OR—

UM OH.



THREE BODIES...
AND IT MAY BE HASTY
WORK, BUT IT'S STILL
THE RIPPER'S.

LOOKS LIKE I'M
DOOMED TO GET
EMBROILED IN SHAK-
REEN'S TROUBLES
WITH--

AAAACE!!



I COULDA
SHOWN CATS WERE
NOCTURNAL!



DROP,
BRIDGET!

TELL THIS
THING IT'S AFTER
DAWN, WILL YA??!

DROP!!



SHE
DOES...

--AND THE
LEAPING JAGUAR
HURTLES PAST
HER--

EYE-FIRST
INTO A JOLT
FROM MY
SCRAM-
BACK.

VIEEBEEBEEB

SEEING STARG,
IT FLEES

YOU HAD THE
GUN, BRIDGET! WHY
DIDN'T YOU--

IT WAS JUST A
CAT, ACE...

WITH
CLAWS SHARP
ENOUGH TO--

YOU LOVE
CLOCKS, I LOVE
ANIMALS. AND AFTER
THAT POOR CAT IN
GALILEO'S TOWER--

ENOUGH, BRIDGET--
I UNDERSTAND.

BUT DO YOU
THINK YOU CAN BRING
YOURSELF TO PULL
THE TRIGGER ON
THESE BEASTS,
BABE?

HUH--? THE
NIGHTGALINTS!

YOU BET YOUR BUTT,
ACEY-DEUCE, BUT I'D
BETTER WARN YA...

I'VE ONLY GOT
THREE BULLETS
LEFT.

AS THE CIRCLE OF
HORROR TIGHTENS
I HAVE NO DOUBT
THIS IS THE END.

BRIDGET, YOU
DESERVE SOME EXPLANATIONS
IN WHAT LITTLE TIME REMAINS

FIRST,
I'VE ONLY COME
TO FULLY TRUST YOU
QUITE RECENTLY

I KNOW, ACE--
IT'S HURT.



BUT THE WAY YOU COMMITTED MURDICE--

--TO JOIN ME SO WILLINGLY...



THAT'S ONE.

I'M AN ADVENTURER-- AND MAYBE YOU ONLY TRUST ME NOW, BUT I'VE LOVED YOU FROM THE BEGINNING, ACE.



I...I ACTUALLY THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE A DARK GIRL, ONE OF KROK'S EBONATI AGENTS PLANTED IN MY--

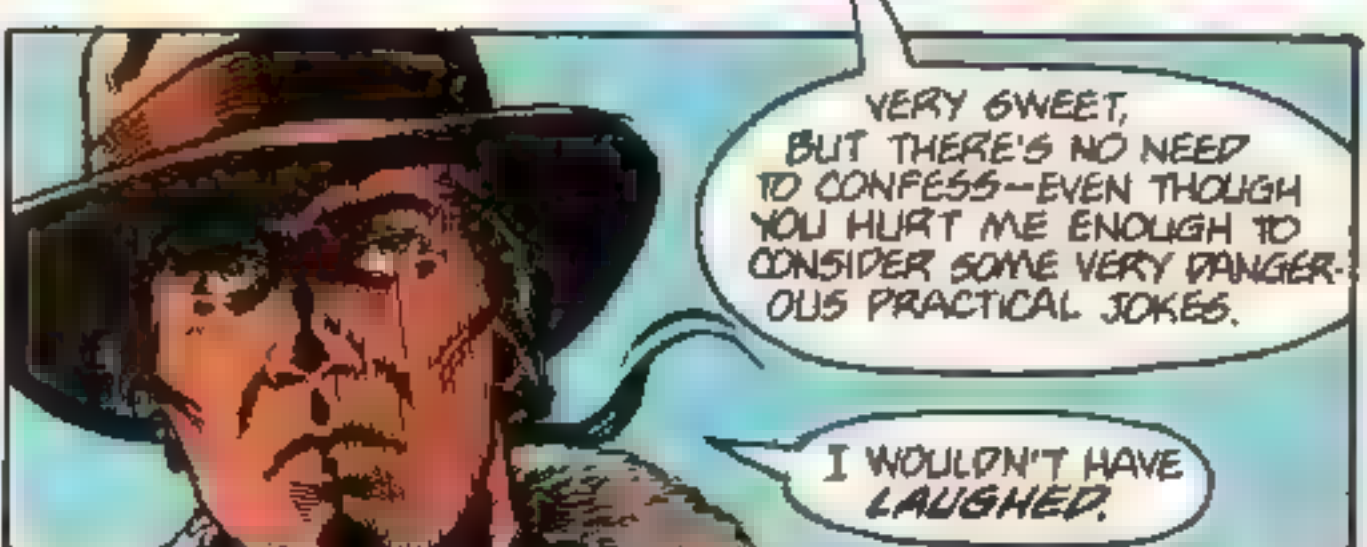


BED? THAT'S TWO.

IN MY HEART, BRIDGET.

BRAM

AND THREE.



VERY SWEET, BUT THERE'S NO NEED TO CONFESS--EVEN THOUGH YOU HURT ME ENOUGH TO CONSIDER SOME VERY DANGEROUS PRACTICAL JOSES.

I WOULDN'T HAVE LAUGHED.



NO KIDDIN'...BUT SINCE THEY'RE GETTIN' CLOSER, HADN'T YOU BETTER PAY UP ON THOSE EXPLANATIONS?

IT'S...IT'S ALL TOO COMPLICATED FOR DETAILS...

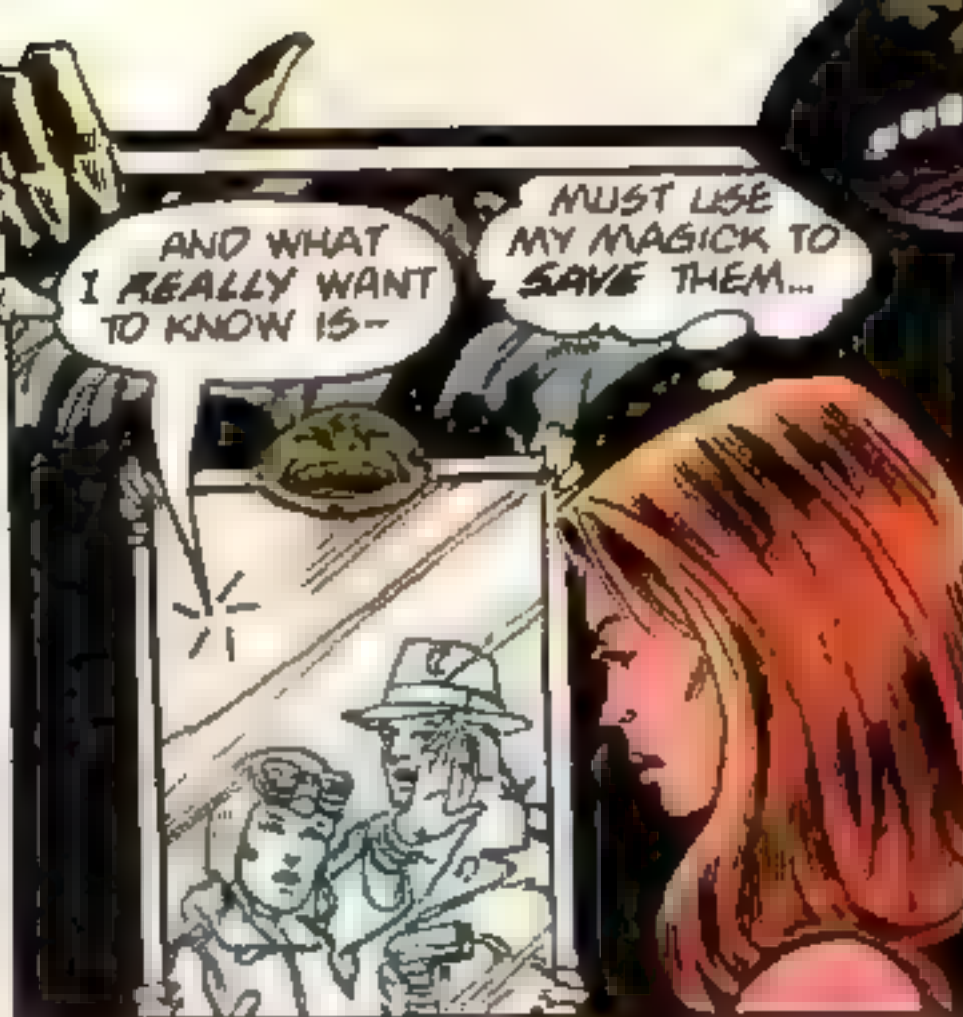


...BUT KROK AND HIS GANG ARE FROM A DIFFERENT REALITY ON THE FAR SIDE OF FIVE WORLDS--A "PARALLEL TIMESTREAM" WHICH IS THREATENED BY SOMETHING OUR TIMELINE HAS NEVER FACED

SHAKREEN'S MENTAL AND MIRROR ABILITIES--CALL THEM "MAGICK"--TRANSPORTED THEM TO FIVE WORLDS, AND FROM THERE THEY BRIDGED TO MY LAB AT THE KEY MOMENT --RIGHT AFTER MY DISCOVERY OF TIME-SHIFTING.

SINCE THEN THEY'VE BEEN USING MY STOLEN--AND IMPROVED--TECHNOLOGY TO SUBVERT OUR TIMESTREAM IN AN EFFORT TO PRESERVE THEIR OWN FROM--

UH...LIKE YOU SAID, ACEY-DEUCE IT'S TOO COMPLICATED-- AND I'VE SHOT MY LAST BULLET...



AND WHAT I REALLY WANT TO KNOW IS--

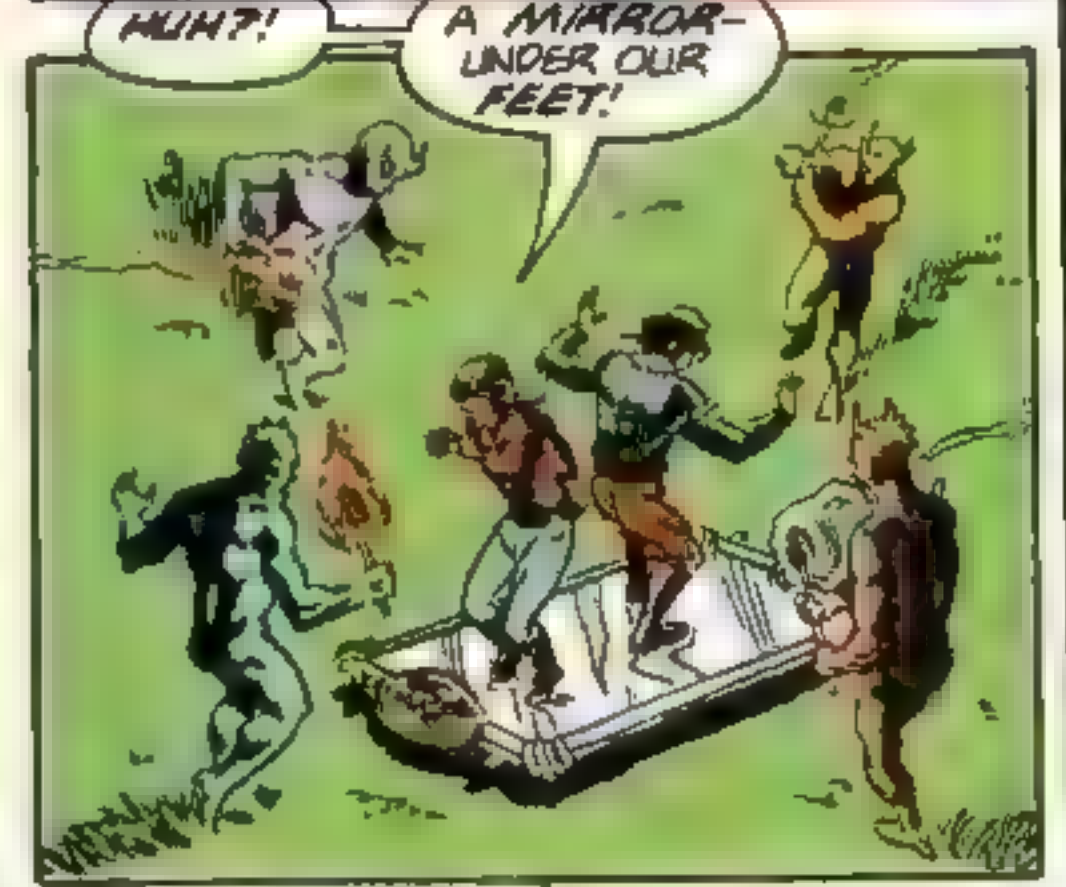
MUST USE MY MAGICK TO SAVE THEM...



--DID YOU AND SHAKREEN EVER ACTUALLY--

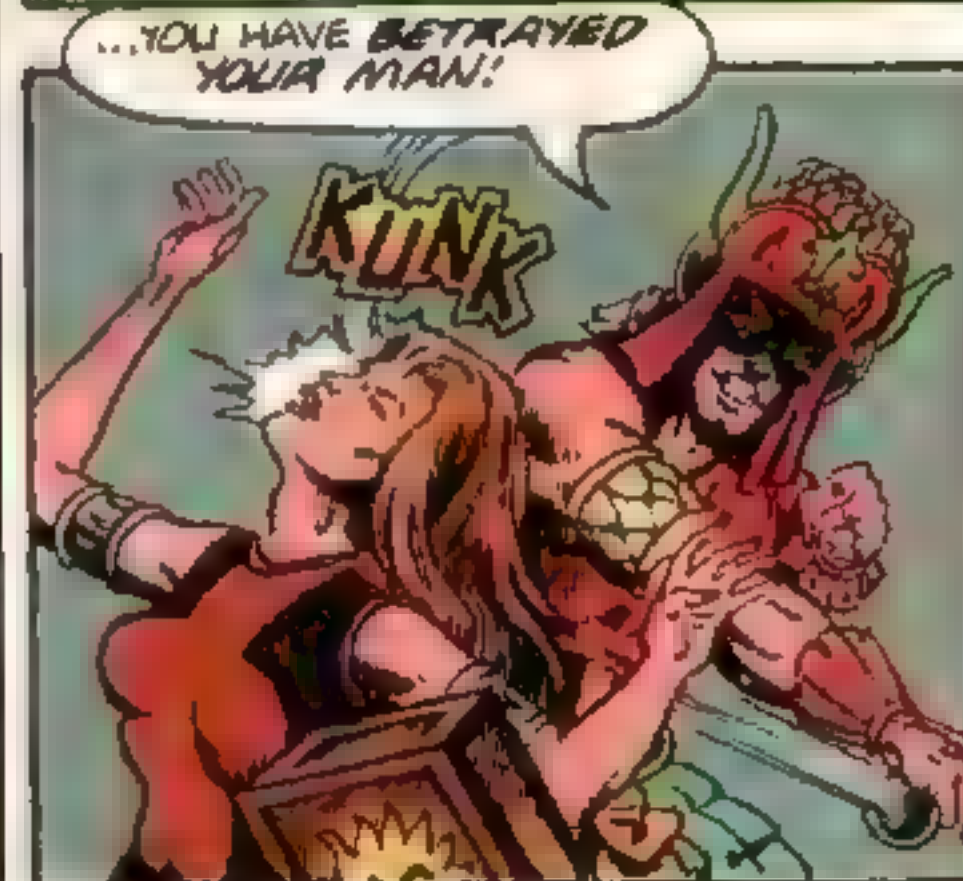


LIKE ALL WOMEN, MY PRETTY-PRETTY...



WUN?!

A MIRROR-- UNDER OUR FEET!

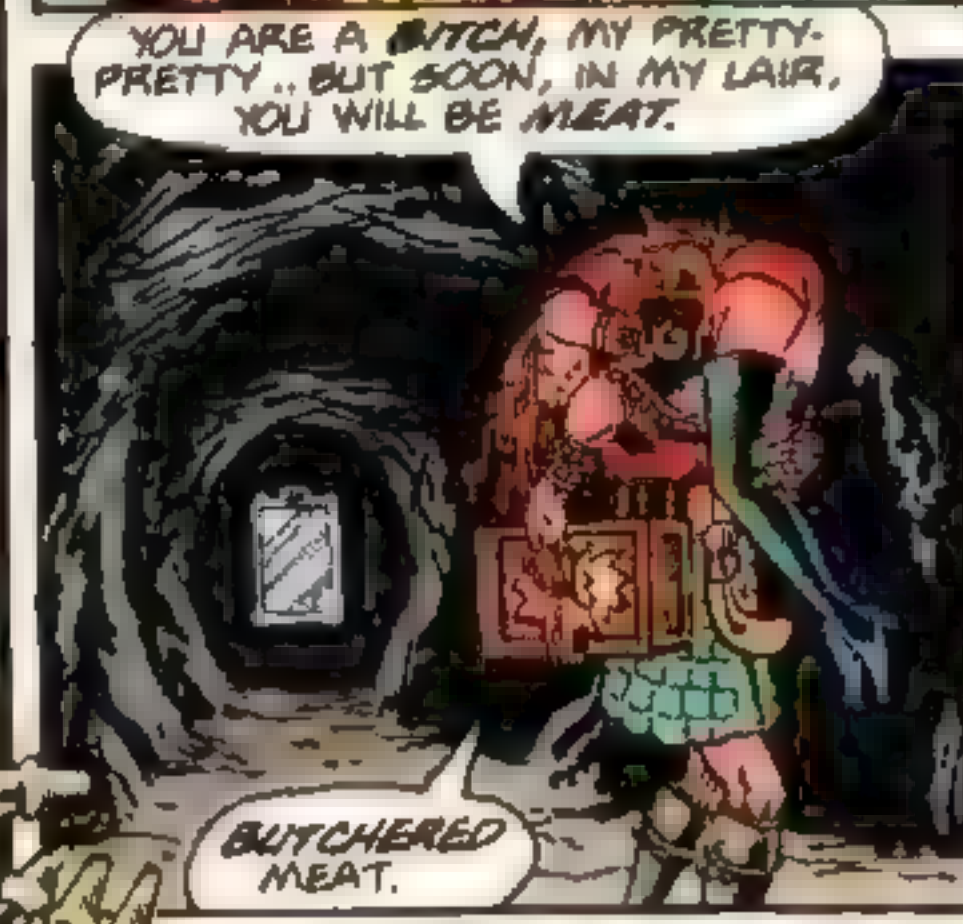


...YOU HAVE BETRAYED YOUR MAN!

KUNK

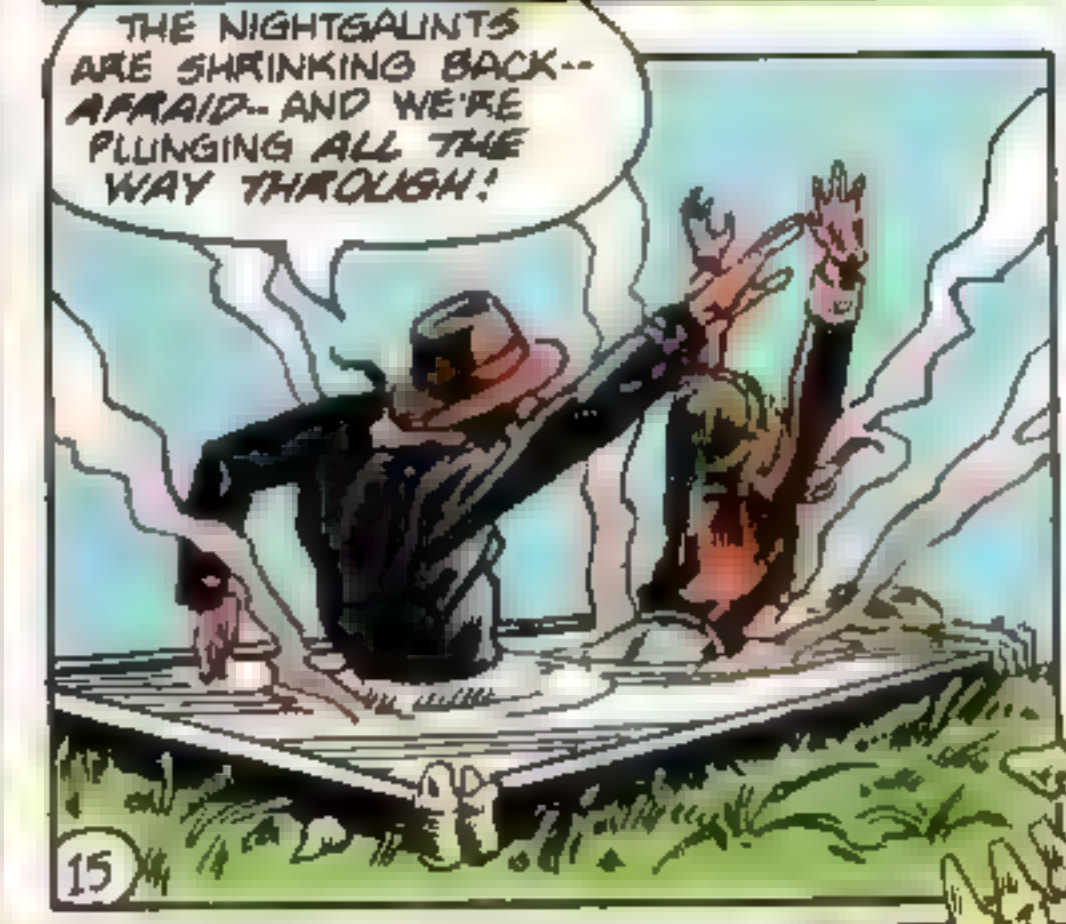


THE MIRROR-- STARTING TO SMOKE-- AND WE'RE SHAKING THROUGH IT!



YOU ARE A BITCH, MY PRETTY. PRETTY... BUT SOON, IN MY LAIR, YOU WILL BE MEAT.

BUTCHERED MEAT.



THE NIGHTGALINTS ARE SHRINKING BACK-- AFRAID-- AND WE'RE PLUNGING ALL THE WAY THROUGH!

IT'S SHAKREEN'S
DOING--IT MUST
BE!

SHE'S USED HER
"MIRROR MASICK" TO
SAVE US!

SHE'S RIGHT; I CONVERT THE SCRAMBACK'S ENERGY
INTO A HIGH-INTENSITY BEACON WHOSE GLARE REVEALS--

A TUNNEL
STUFFED WITH
BATS!

"SAVED US,"
DID SHE?"

ACE--YOU
HEAR THAT
FROM UP AHEAD?
SOUNDS LIKE
FIGHTING...

YEAH, WHAT
IS THAT
AMMONIA
SMELL FROM?

WHAT IN
HELL IS
GOING ON
DOWN HERE?

BRIDGET,
MY CAREFULLY
CONSIDERED
GUESS IS...
A DOMESTIC
SQUABBLE.

THE STUFF
YOU'RE
SPLASHING
IN--GUANO.

SHOULD'VE
KNOWN FROM
THE STENCH OF
AMMONIA...

AND NOW YOU
PROBABLY WISH YOU'D BIT
YOUR TONGUE AND KEPT ME
IN THE DARK WITH THOSE
"EXPLANATIONS"...BUT WHY
DON'T YOU LIGHT UP YOUR
SCRAMBACK TO SEE WHERE
WE ARE, HUH?

YES--SHAKREEN'S
SHADOW KNIGHTS
AND KROK'S
NIGHTGALINTS--
ENGAGED IN
HELLISH
VIOLENCE

THIS...THIS PLACE
--A WHOLE FORTRESS--
--UNDERGROUND-- IN
1318! WHO BUILT
IT, ACE?

IT HAD TO
BE SHAKREEN!
BRIDGET--ONLY SHE
KNEW I USE THIS YEAR
AND VICINITY AS
HOME BASE.

AND SHE WAS
PLANNING TO MOVE
INTO THE NEIGHBOR-
HOOD...BUT WHAT
DO WE DO NOW?

THE SAME--
TRY TO ESCAPE
WITH OUR LIVES
AFTER STOPPING
TEZCATLIPOCA...

YEAH,
THERE'S STILL
HIM TO--

ACE! OVER
THERE!

GOOD GIRL,
BRIDGET!

IT'S HIM--AND HE'S GOT
SHAKREEN--CLIMBING DOWN
THAT NETTING INTO A
DEEPER PIT!

I'M GOING AFTER HIM— BUT DON'T YOU TRY ANYTHING HEROIC, YOU HEAR?



WHAT WAS THAT? MUST'VE GOTTEN SOME GLANDS IN MY EAR

PAUSING ONLY TO SNATCH UP A FALLEN DARK ROD—



—AND FEELING LIKE A SPIDER MISSING HALF ITS LEGS—



—I DESCEND INTO THE PIT.

KROK HIMSELF SEES ME

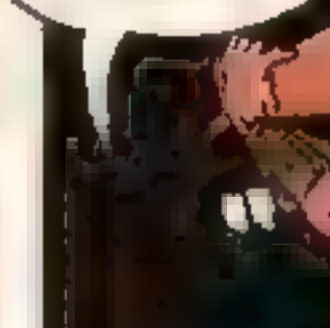
SO SHE HAS BEEN BORNE OFF BY HER MAD "PROTECTOR"!



—AND I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN CAZA WOULD BE AFTER HER TOO.

AND NOW THE MAD ONE ALSO SEES ME

CAZA... COME TO TAKE MY PRETTY. PRETTY?



FINISH OFF THE REST OF HER SHADOW KNIGHTS AND THEN USE PLASMA TO DESTROY THIS PLACE.



I'LL USE THE TUNNEL TO CUT THEM OFF AND GET THE BOX.

MEET ME BY THE CHASM WHEN YOU'RE FINISHED.



PARDON ME FOR BEING HEROIC, ACEY-DELICE--



—BUT IF I CAN ELIMINATE KROK ONCE AND FOR ALL—

—MAYBE YOU AND ME CAN FINALLY SETTLE DOWN TO THE QUIET LIFE IN SOME FORGOTTEN CUBBYHOLE OF TIME.



LIKE FOREVER.

LET HELL TAKE HER THEN!



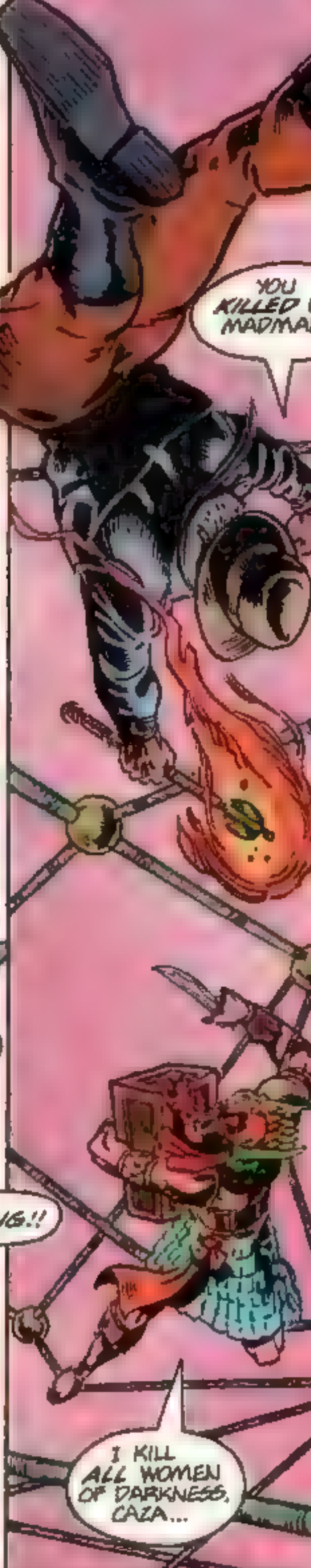
SHAKREEN!!

MMH...?

WHERE...?

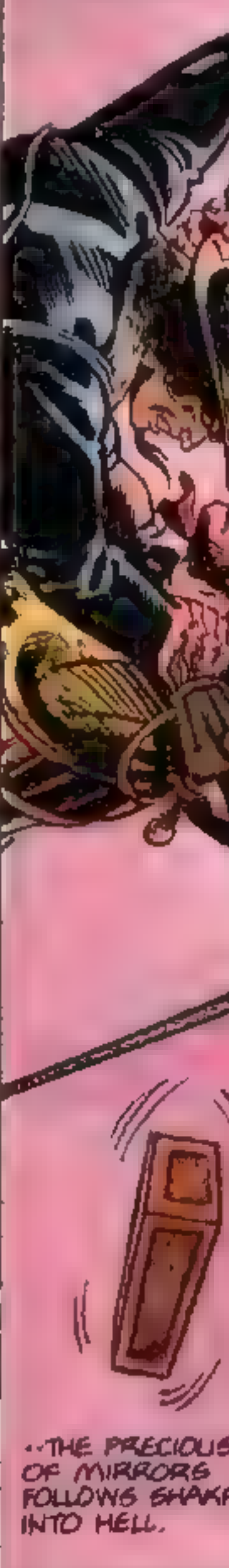
F-FALLING!!

I SNAP, BECOMING FOR A MOMENT AS MAD AS HIM, AND I LEAP THROUGH THE SCAFFOLD-WEBBING— INTO A BLACKNESS OF UNKNOWN DEPTH.



YOU KILLED HER, MADMAN!

AND AS I LOCK WITH HIM, ARRESTING MY OWN FALL—



...ALL WHORES!

I KILL ALL WOMEN OF DARKNESS, CAZA...

...THE PRECIOUS BOX OF MIRRORS FOLLOWS SHAKREEN INTO HELL.

HE DROPS HER!

HE LEFT
THIS
TUNNEL--

--AND HE'S MOVING
ALONG THE EDGE OF
THAT CHASM TO
ANOTHER TUNNEL...

IT'S A PERFECT
OPPORTUNITY--AND
I'VE GOTTA KEEP
TELLING MYSELF
HE'S A **MURDERER**--
A COLD-BLOODED
ASSASSIN...

IT'S THE ONLY
WAY I CAN BRING
MYSELF TO SHOVE
HIM OFF--

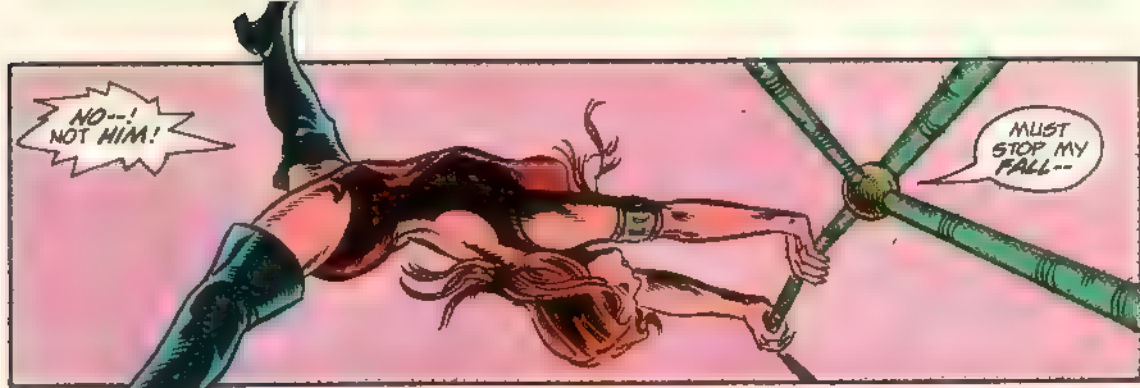
YOU CALL
THAT A SILENT
RUSH, WOMAN--?

EEEEEEEE

HAH.



THE
BOX--!



NO--! NOT HIM!

MUST STOP MY FALL--



--AND CATCH THE BOX!



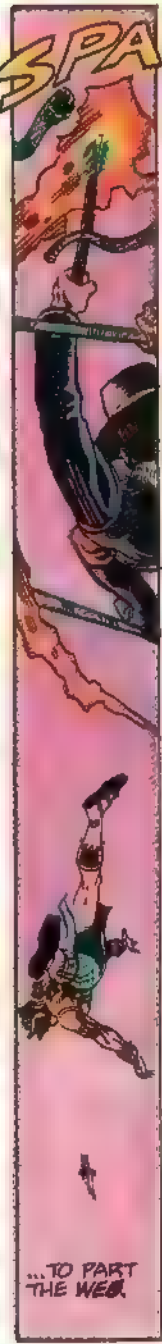
YOU FACE **TESCATLIPOCA CAZA--** LORD OF THE **SMOKING MIRROR--** DEMON-GOD OF THE **CURVED OBSIDIAN KNIFE!**

YOU FACE ONE WHO HAS KILLED **MANY WOMEN** IN HIS TIME--AS WELL AS IN **OTHER TIMES--**

--AND KILLING A **SINGLE MAN**, THOUGH HARDLY AS **TASTY**, WILL NEITHER BE MORE **DIFFICULT!**



INDEED-- REFLECTED DEATH IS CLEARLY SEEN IN HIS **MAD EYES**, AND MUCH AS I WOULD DEARLY LOVE TO STUFF THIS **DARK ROD** DOWN HIS **THROAT--**



SPAP

...TO PART THE **WEB.**

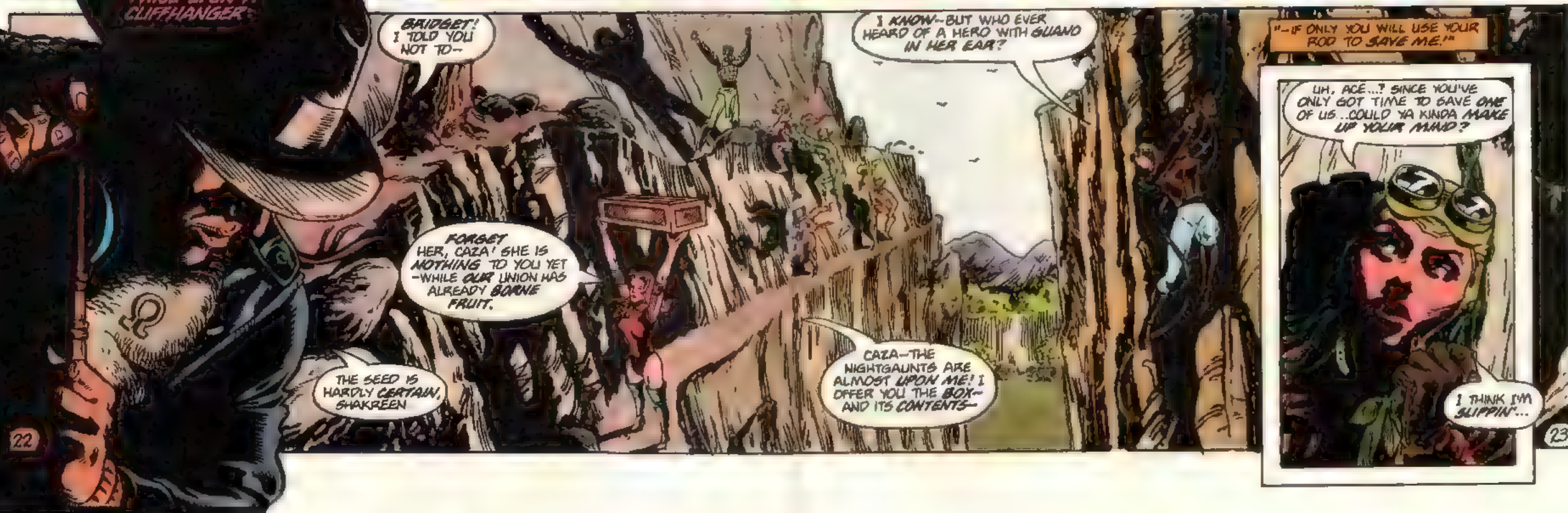
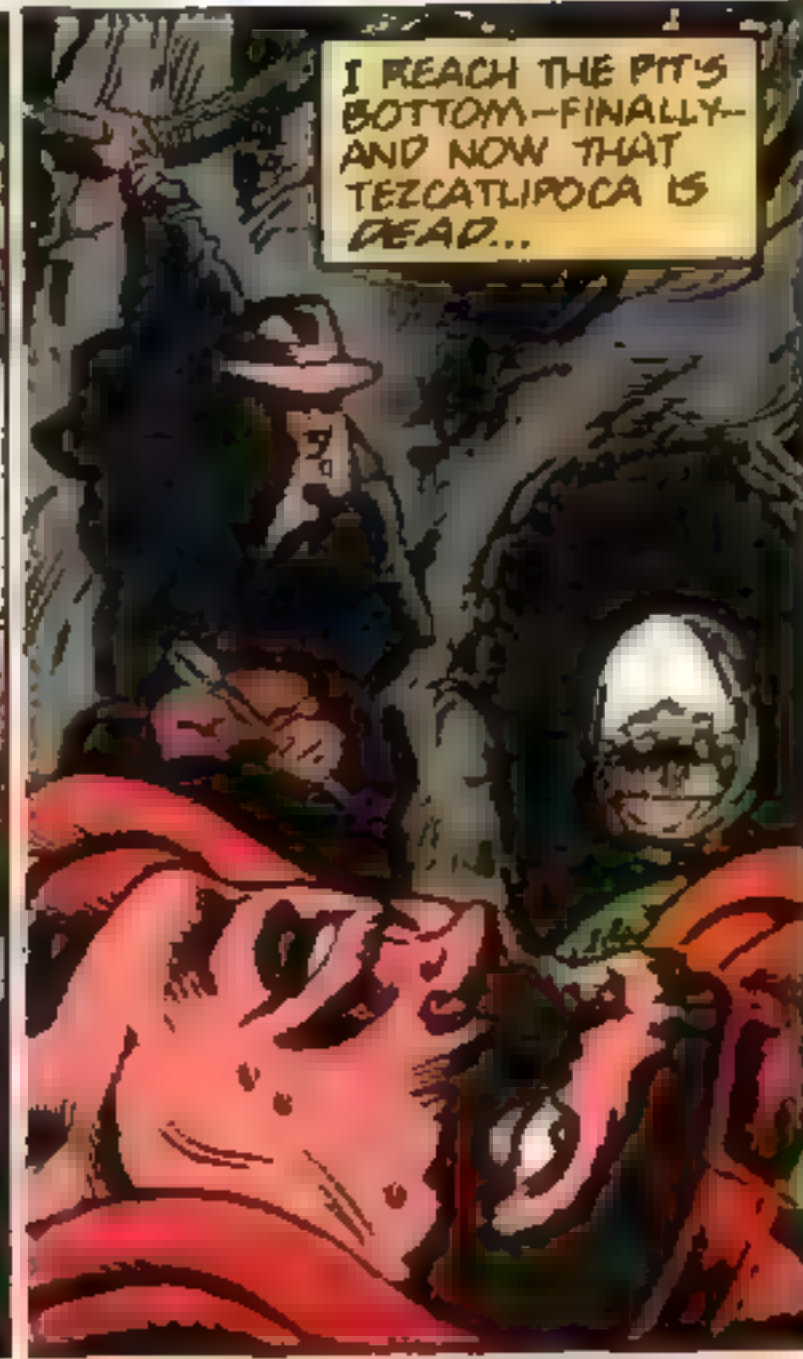
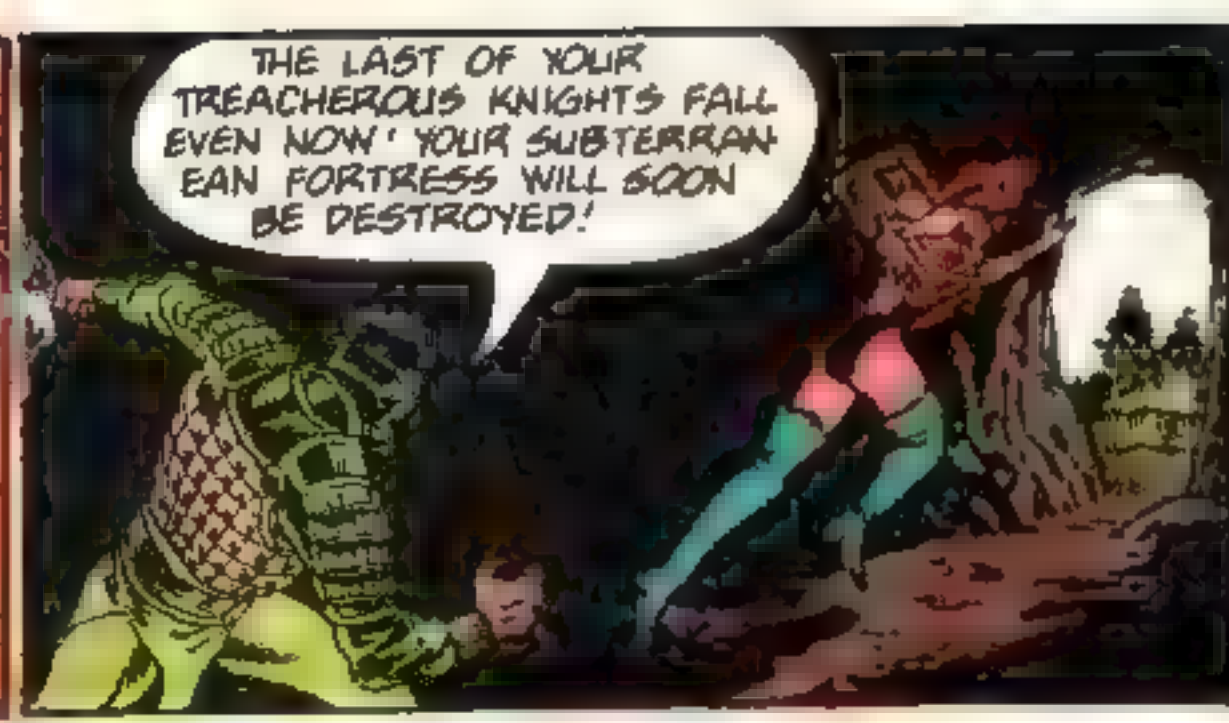
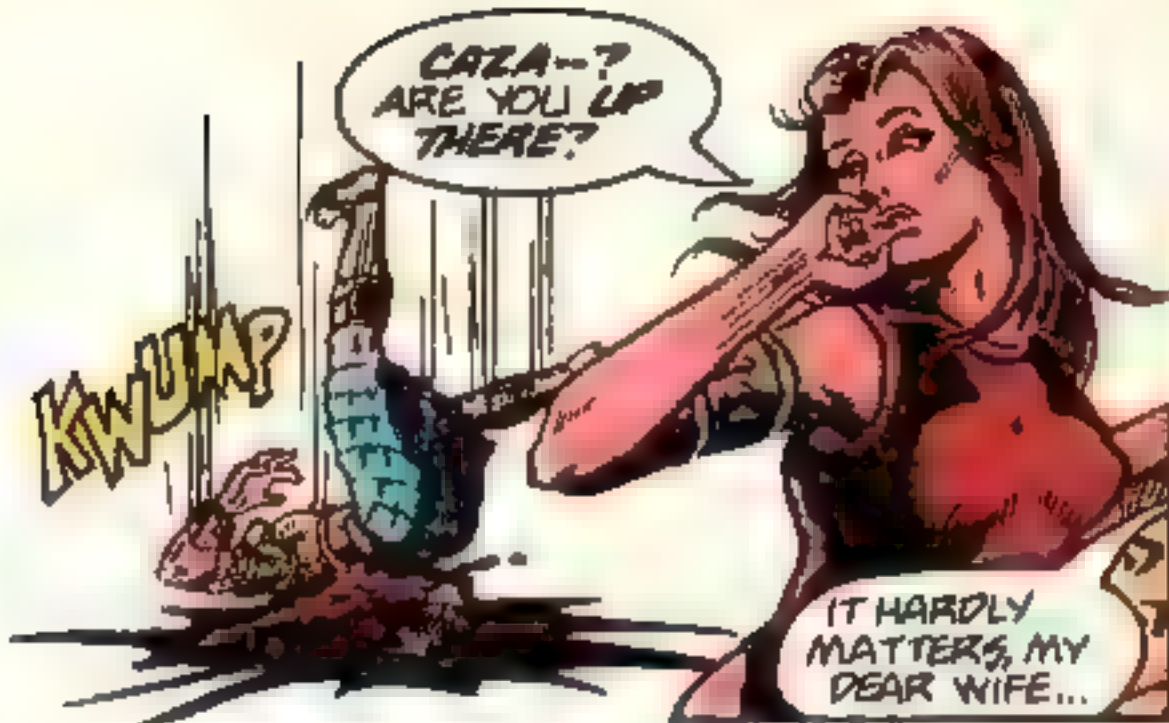


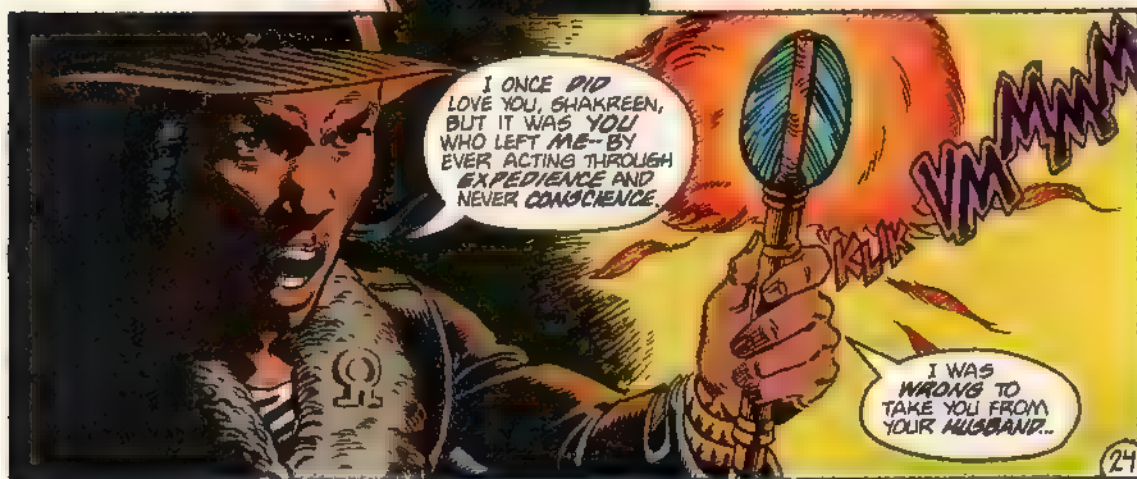
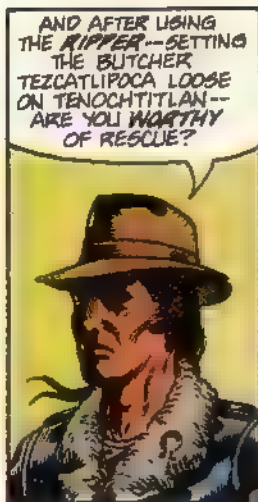
PLAK

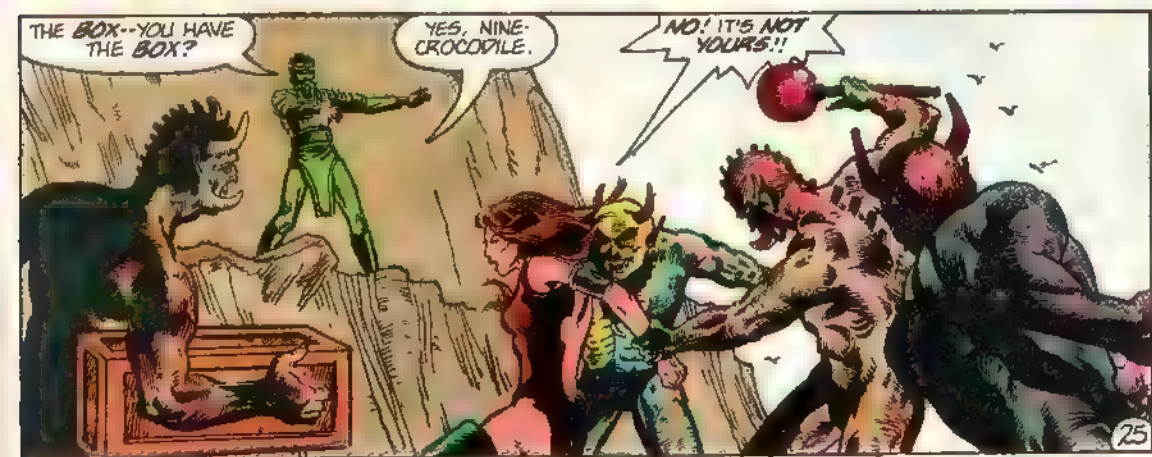
CHINKT

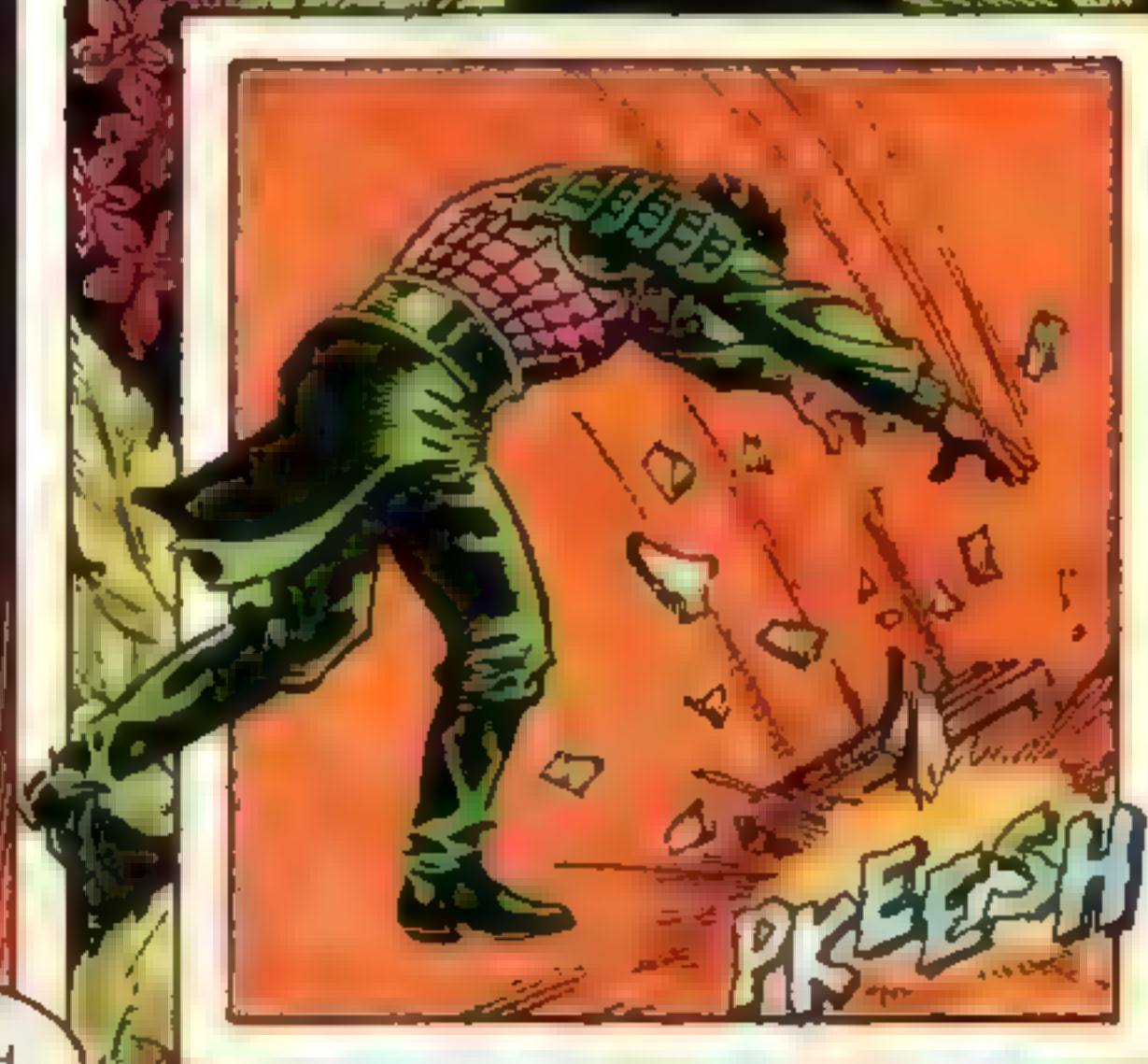
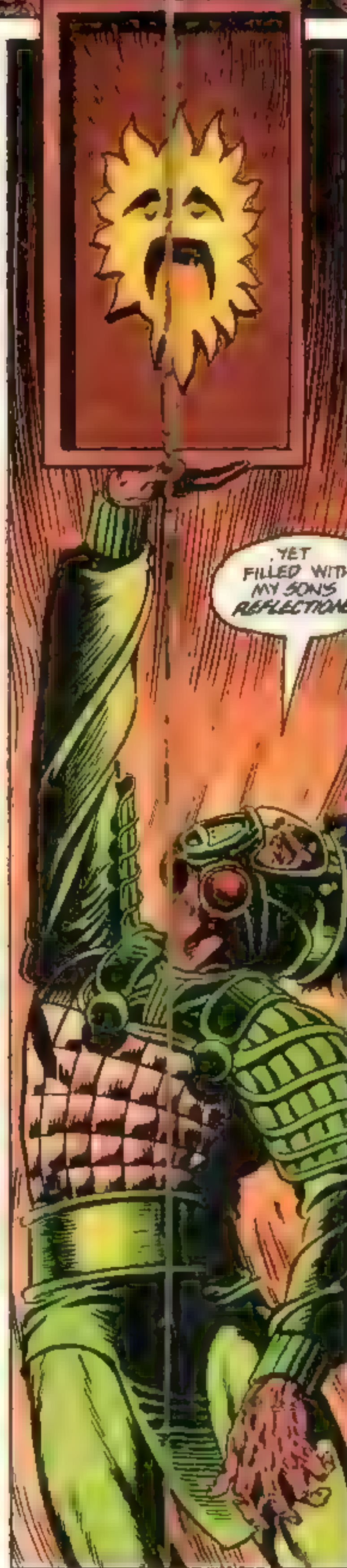
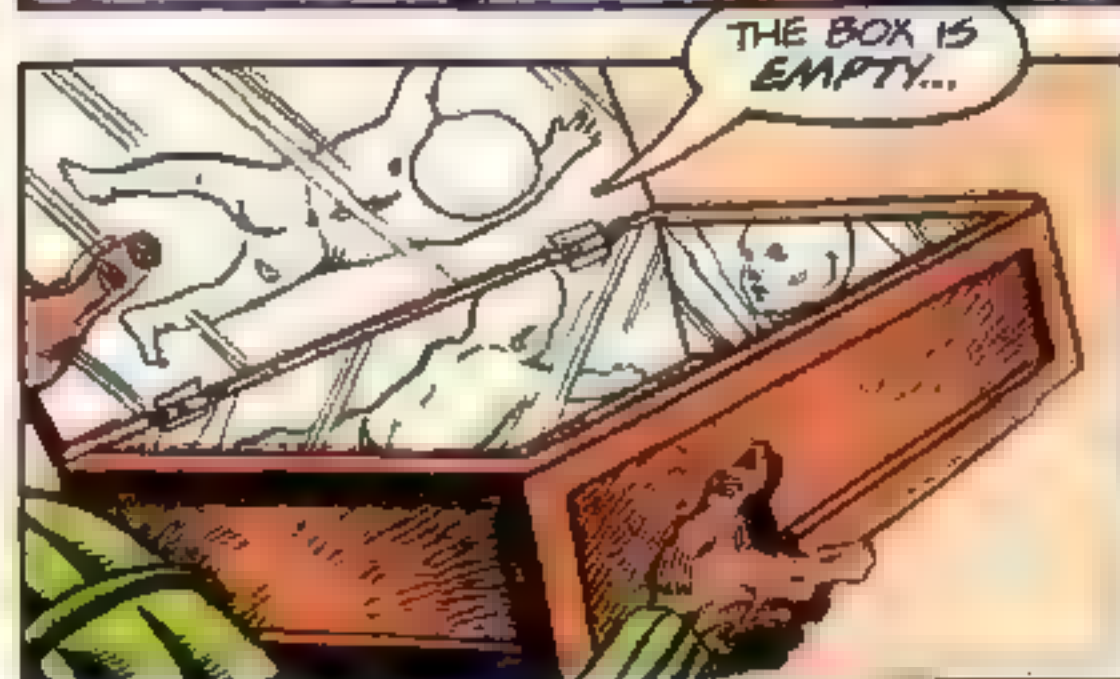
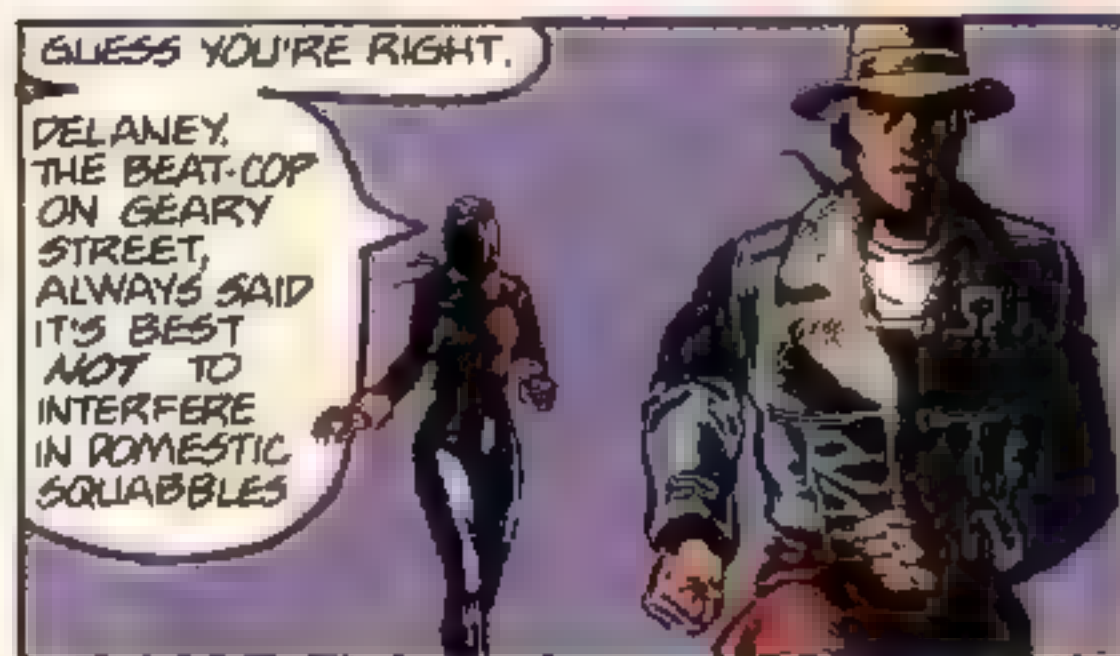
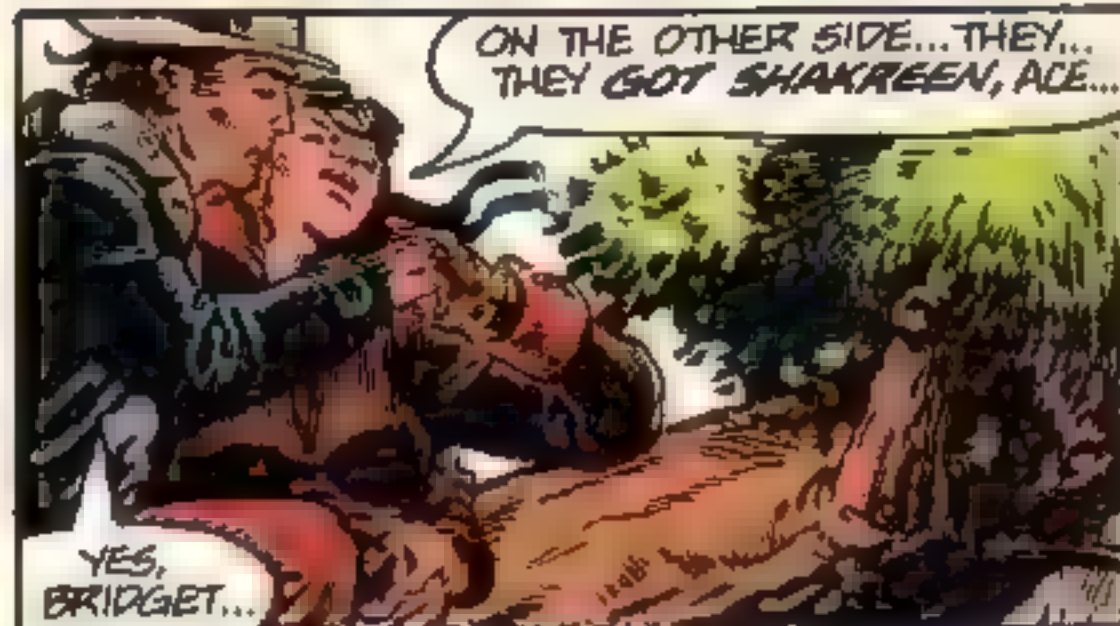


THE **CURVED OBSIDIAN KNIFE...**



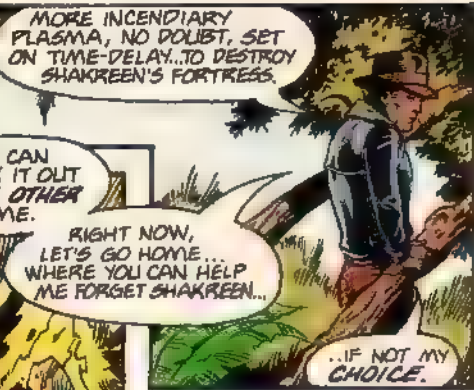




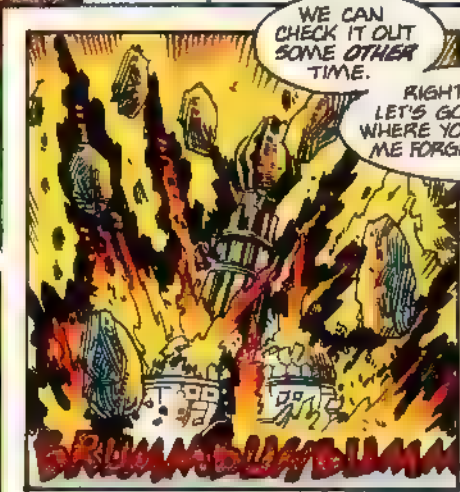




THAT NOISE--
AND THE GROUND'S
SHAKING...



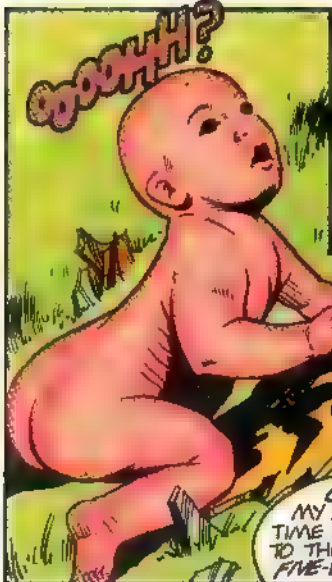
MORE INCENDIARY
PLASMA, NO DOUBT, SET
ON TIME-DELAY...TO DESTROY
SHAKREEN'S FORTRESS.



WE CAN
CHECK IT OUT
SOME OTHER
TIME.

RIGHT NOW,
LET'S GO HOME...
WHERE YOU CAN HELP
ME FORGET SHAKREEN...

...IF NOT MY
CHOICE.

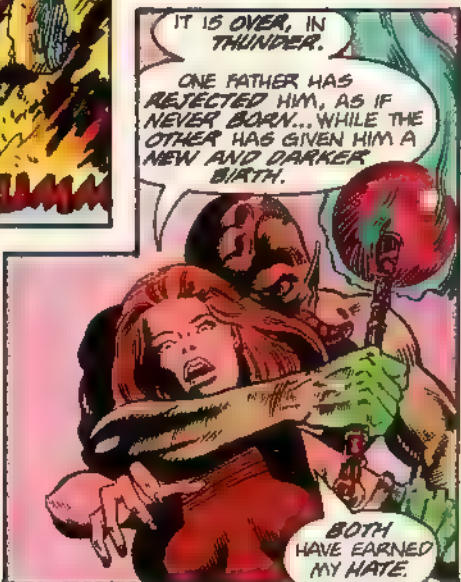


BOONH?

COME,
MY SON...IT IS
TIME TO RETURN
TO THE LIMBO OF
FIVE-WORLDS...



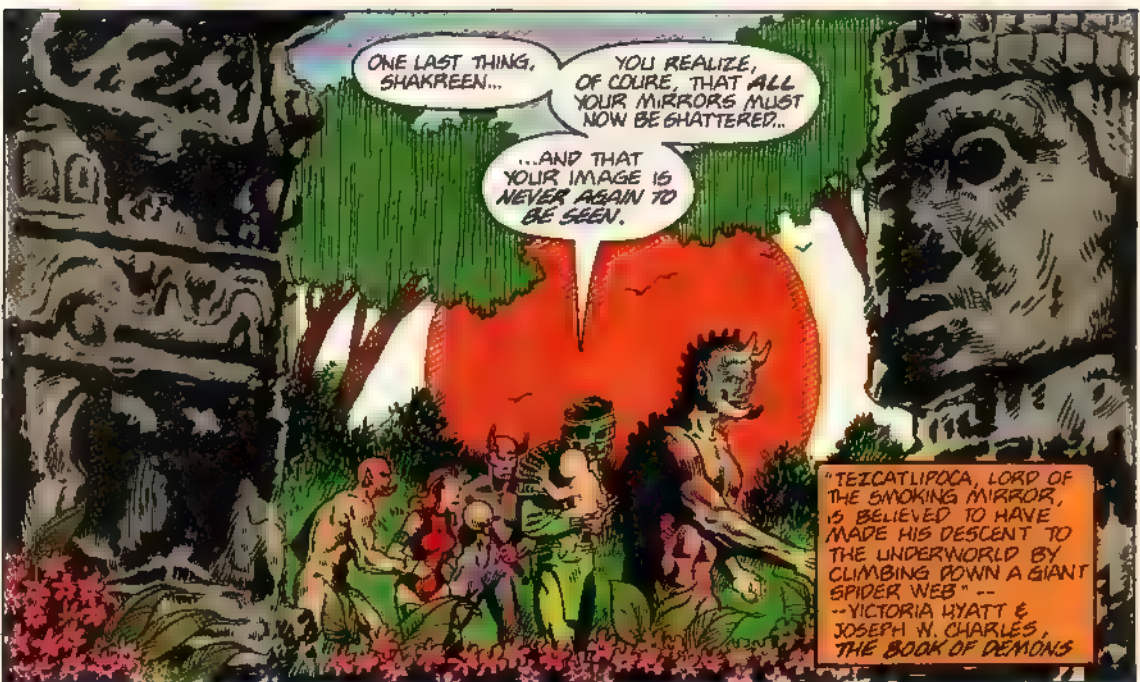
...TIME TO
GO HOME.



IT IS OVER, IN
THUNDER.

ONE FATHER HAS
REJECTED HIM, AS IF
NEVER BORN...WHILE THE
OTHER HAS GIVEN HIM A
NEW AND DARKER
BIRTH.

BOTH
HAVE EARNED
MY HATE.



ONE LAST THING,
SHAKREEN...

YOU REALIZE,
OF COURSE, THAT ALL
YOUR MIRRORS MUST
NOW BE SHATTERED...

...AND THAT
YOUR IMAGE IS
NEVER AGAIN TO
BE SEEN.

"TEZCATLIPOCA, LORD OF
THE SMOKING MIRROR,
IS BELIEVED TO HAVE
MADE HIS DESCENT TO
THE UNDERWORLD BY
CLIMBING DOWN A GIANT
SPIDER WEB" --
--VICTORIA HYATT &
JOSEPH W. CHARLES,
THE BOOK OF DEMONS



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Dear Doug,

Yeah, it's me again, after a few months of regretted silence concerning *ACE*. Since transferring to the University of Illinois last August, I'm busier than I've ever been which has led me to writing only one LOC since then (to Swamp Thing, if you're curious). Anyway, it's Christmas break, I'm lonely for the challenge of my Rhet class, so what could be more challenging than a letter to you and your comic? Some things have been percolating about *Ace* for some time now — which means, I guess, brace yourself for another epic!

Some of the appeal of *Ace* has been musical: references to Dion (whom I once did a stripzine about tangentially), Billie Holiday, and issue 7's John Lennon mention and Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time" quote — a beautiful song and oh how appropriate. There are even references to music on the letters pages, like the Grateful Dead. The obvious trivia question here is: What is the best music to read *Aztec Ace* by?

Not just anything will do, mind you. *Astral Weeks* comes to mind, but then *Astral Weeks* is the perfect accompaniment to practically anything. Dion I haven't tried, but I'll bet it or a good doo-wop tape would be great. So much, of course, depends on the tastes of the reader: I can't imagine listening to the Dead and reading *Ace*, but I'm sure some do. As for me, I look for some timeless gem that reminds me of that same elegant antiquity and musty futurity I find in your gem of a comic. Maybe Alan Freed's *Memory Lane*, *The Sun Sessions*, or *The Velvet Underground* — all three albums of breathtaking beauty and purity, all produced in some fabulous and of shadow and sunlight where all the clocks show different times, because time is irrelevant. Like those three albums, *Aztec Ace* is, and that's it. No questions asked.

That *could* be my letter, and would have been last summer. But the David Allen who writes this now, at the tail end of December, has had a semester of experience tucked under his belt, just as *Ace* has had a few issues to ripen, and so there is more to this than there once would have been. I still enjoy this series immensely — it ranks behind only *Cerebus* and *Swamp Thing* with me — and something about it makes it impervious to criticism. It's possible to pick at it, of course, but *Ace* strikes me like those a-bums, a work complete unto itself, produced with unfal- ing craftsmanship, that has to be accepted. It may not be the abso ute best, but it seems impossible to really improve on it. When I hear those beautiful Fifties' ballads, each introduced by Alan Freed, who advises us to hold hands with our wife, our boyfriend, or our girlfr end and remember when we first heard these songs — even though the man has turned to dust and the songs were recorded before my birth; when I hear Elvis inventing rock and roll, telling us with primal urgency and Sam Phillips' echo about those milk cow blues and that mystery train — and when I hear Lou Reed singing about a teenage girl named Candy's search for love, hear him writing and performing

with a candor and compassion almost unknown — when I experience all this, I drink deep of time and sentence and beauty and art and the mysteries. But *Ace*.

Well, sometimes I have my doubts, and so I'm here to pick at you a bit. *Ace* is a wonderful comic, it truly is, but there are times when I'm not so enamored of it. The mystery is there — of being sucked into a different world where time ticks at one-third the regular pace and everything is a reflection of something else. But where's the soul?

Aztec Ace is so well done, and Doug you are such a talented writer, but sometimes I think you're too clever for your own good. Your plots are so complex they make a caduceus look like a smile button, and the punny dialogue — often as good as Caniff's Canyon — always impresses. But it often irritates as well. I like these characters, but I don't find you giving me as much of an emotional stake in them as I'd like. Your stories hit but they get the mind, not the heart.

Now maybe I'm asking for too much. After a while, I'm sure you conceived *Ace* as a fun comic — an intellectualizing joyride, as it were. But as for me, I'd have more fun if I really felt for the characters, if instead of being struck by the plot convolutions, all the frantic puppetry were dropped and I saw something that touched me, that moved me, that made me cry.

So of course you wrote issue 7. I didn't cry, but was moved. Caza and Bridget in the rain touched me like Denny Colt and Sand Saref meeting on the pier, and like Swamp Thing and Abigail in this month's issue when Swampy asks her if she likes the taste of lime. A girl I used to be friends with once told me that she knew a piece of writing was good, really good, if it gave her a chill. That criterion is so subjective, and often not applicable... but what the hell. *Ace* 7 gave me a chill.

Up until that last paragraph would have been my second letter to you, and would have been until this evening when I read this issue. But I write it anyway to let you know how I feel about the direction I wish this most remarkable of series would take. If you waited this long to take the cold finger of the real mysteries up my spine, then I fear next issue and next will be intellectually stimulating joyrides, and on and on. That's fine you know. But I know you're capable of deeper pleasures: like this issue, like the Shang, Leiko/Reston triangle. I like your John Lennon and your music box stories in *Moon Knight*. You have a reader for life in me, Doug, as long as you maintain an acceptable level of quality — a level you are quite far above now, believe me. Just consider this a small plea for more heart, more art... and more chills.

I feel a bit silly giving you advice... I'm just a fan and occasional letterhack, and you are a fine, fine writer. I admire and respect you and your work very much. I know I don't have to ask you to "please consider my views," because I know you will — what I hope is that made a point you'll think is valid. In any case, at last I found a way to actually comment on *Ace*. And if you

print this, maybe you'll find a way to comment on my letters, at long last! Not that I don't like your "Hoooo"s

Thanks for your time. I hope it's not a few months before I have time to write again - but it probably will be. Nobody ever said going to a university was easy. (If someone had, I would have a few things to say about it.) Hope you and your family enjoyed the holiday season and best of luck in your many endeavors.

David Allen
5 Douglas Drive
Olney, IL 62450

I dunno about the perfect music for listening to *Ace* David, but definitely a different song for every sequence speeding it up and slowing it down in the DJ's credo gone warped. I agree: *Astral Weeks*, yes, *Grateful Dead*, no (Apologies to my crazy-over-Garcia wife Deb.) And "timeless" music, yes indeed, the only kind I ever really like anyway. Me, I'm test-running my brand-spanking new turntable (and lord, have prices dropped better machine for half what I paid on the last one in '76) with three LPs that may or may not pass time's test: John Fogerty's *Centerfield* (definitely), Television's *Marquee Moon* (probably), and the new Bangles (possibly). I'm also realizing as a result of a long solo late-night car drive, home from Manhattan with radio but no dashboard TV, that much of the current music is much better *without* the video.

Commenting on the heart of your letter is tougher (and tell the truth, did cat put you up to this?) [no - cat], but I'll try by saying that, yes I could "easily" turn out more "emotional" pieces a la Shang-Chi and crew. Nor would I necessarily be unhappy doing so. Indeed, I plan to bring that feel and sensibility to some of my other upcoming work and even to future issues of *Ace*, if only in oblique (but who knows? possibly *beightened*) fashion. The point, however, is that after having *Kung Fu* I had no immediate interest in repeating it; I deliberately attempted to strike new and radically different notes in *Aztec Ace*. Maybe not the most commercial decision, and perhaps not even a sound one stylistically, but I give myself credit for *trying* to break out of a rut, despite the fact that I'm still proud of that "rut."

Again, I dunno. If *Ace* fails in sales, either I'll retreat from such attempts and "go back to what I do best" (and what I'm already doing with my DC work on *Batman*, the upcoming *Lords of the Ultra-Realm* and *Electric Warrior* and my Epic work on *Sir from Sirius*) - or I'll attempt something really drastic like leaving comics.

But of course, I'm still very much hoping there's enough of an audience for *Ace* the way it is and more of an audience for *Ace* the way it *will* be. Yes, changes in style/ambience are indeed in store for this book, and no, after all the preceding longwindedness, I'm not compromising. It's largely a function of finally honing in on the series' original vision, after a much longer and more convoluted foundation-setting than I ever could have dreamed possible. But then, all of time is a Big Place, is it not?

Hooo

Dear Douglass,

Most astounding is your work on *Aztec Ace*! Now I know what you do between crankng out Detective and Batman every month. Gee, you certainly must be a busy guy . . .

Anyways - combine Dr. Who with Errol Flynn and Jay Silverheels and you come up with the *Ace*. Granted my recipe is hyperbole, but there aren't very many ways to tel. al. your friends about a guy who makes the past safe for the future.

I enjoyed issue 8 and your portrayal of Galileo. The dead cats thrown in made the tale seem more symbolic to me. It was a nice touch. And what about *Ace*'s warning? I know why Bridget should stay away from the '60s, but what's so bad about the end of the '80s???

Once again the artistic team of Dan Day and Nestor Redondo is exquisite. The perfect artists for the book are they, and I hope that their collaboration continues for some time to come.

As for the book's complexity, come one. Sure it is a little more historically oriented and avant garde, but as the comic fan gets older and more intellectually inclined "HLLK WILL SMASH!" wears a little thin. The only other two comics published which are challenging to read and interpret are Chaykin's *American Flagg!* and the late Thriller by DC. Such a concept as the one used in *Aztec Ace* is definitely a risk, but a risk worth taking. I hope that you have found an audience for your unique time traveller.

Craig Paeth
4531 Vernon Drive
North Olmstead, OH 44070

Not the end of the '80s, Craig; the end of 1980 - December 8, to be exact, and as it pertains to Beatles music.

Hello,

Let me say from the outset that I am impressed nay, delighted!, with *Aztec Ace*. I don't know how you are going to do it, but if you can maintain the terrific art and dizzying plot, you have a devoted fan in yours truly.

There is a plethora of new titles on the adult comic book market; that's not news. However, speaking for myself, I don't have any more money to spend on comics now than I did a year or so ago. Consequently, people like me are getting pickier about which titles they continue to buy and which new ones they choose to add. Eclipse has made that choice a little easier by publishing some of the best and hottest books on the current market. I place *Sabre* and *Aztec Ace* at the top of that list.

But enough adulation - although I think I'm entitled to gush a little since this is the first letter I've ever been prompted to write to a magazine. I am curious about the NRA emblem that so far has graced every cover of *Aztec Ace*. What, if any, is your relationship with the NRA? If your ties with this powerful and controversial organization are more than ideological, I believe your readers should know. I agree in principle with the things the NRA stands for, such as gun safety and the right of citizens to arm themselves, but I think it's commendable that A.A. finds other means of getting out of sticky situations than strictly bang-bang-shoot-'em-up. So what's the connection?

I wish you all continued success with this bold magazine. See you at the newsstand.

Jarrett Renshaw
5575 Shasta Lane, no. 25
La Mesa, CA 92041

You've got a great name J.R.! Can I steal it for a character someday? As explained before (or maybe it was after), the NRA symbol on our early covers (since dropped because nobody got the joke) signified the National Recovery Administration of Great Depression vintage and had nothing to do with muskets or blunderbusses. (Two bumper stickers seen on a Ford van yesterday: "NRA Forever" and "If Heaven Ain't Like Dixie, I Don't Want It." There was a rifle hanging in the window and somehow I doubt the driver voted for FDR)



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